

S E R M O N S

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

L A T E

Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* TWELFTH.

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Subject of Occasions

By the Rev. Mr. [illegible]

DR JOHN WILKINSON

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S E R M O N CCXXXVIII.

The evidences of the truth of the christian religion.

2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them.

The fifth sermon on this text.

I Am considering the *fourth* evidence, which those who liv'd in our SAVIOUR's time had of his divine authority, viz. the spirit of prophecy proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions. I gave *five* instances of our SAVIOUR's predictions.

1. Those which foretold his death, and its circumstances.

2. Those which foretold his resurrection, and its circumstances.

3. Those which foretold the descent of the HOLY GHOST upon the apostles, with the circumstances thereof.

These *three* I have considered, and now proceed to the *two* which remain.

4. The next instance therefore of our SAVIOUR's prophetical spirit, is his foretelling the destruction of Hierusalem, with the circumstances of it. Now because this is one of the greatest instances of our SAVIOUR's prophetical spirit, and so particular a prediction, so punctually answer'd by the event, therefore I shall insist the longer upon it; especially, because I look upon it

as one of the most convincing arguments, that can be brought against the Jews, for the truth of our religion.

And in order to our clearer proceeding in this matter that I am speaking to, I shall do these *three* things.

First, explain the series and order of this prediction of our SAVIOUR's, concerning the destruction of Hierusalem.

Secondly, expound the particulars of it, as we find them in Matth. xxiv. compared with the other two evangelists that wrote of it, St. Mark and St. Luke.

Thirdly, make some reflections upon this prediction, and the punctual accomplishment of it; from which it may appear of what force this argument is, for the conviction of the Jews of the truth of our religion.

First, I shall explain the series and order of this prediction, concerning the destruction of Hierusalem. And this is necessary, because it seems to most interpreters to be so intermingled with a prophecy of CHRIST's last coming at the end of the world, that it is no easy matter to separate these two prophecies of the destruction of Hierusalem, and the end of the world. Besides that, it is incumber'd with some other difficulties, arising from some particular expressions in this famous prediction of our SAVIOUR's.

From the 34th verse of the xxiiiid chapter of St Matthew, to the 29th of the xxivth chapter, there is a clear prediction of the destruction of Hierusalem, with the preceding signs, and concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it; but at the 29th verse, the prophecy of the end of the world seems to be designedly joined to it; for the evangelist says, *immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, &c.* where he enumerates dismal signs, and forerunners of the dissolution of all things: but it is now 1600 years since the destruction of Hierusalem, and yet the world is not at an end. How is it then that the evangelist says, *immediately after the tribulation of those days?* This is the first difficulty.

Secondly, after this prophecy of the end of the world, we find those words in all the three evangelists, *verily I say*

✓ Ser. 238. of the christian religion.

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say unto you, *this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled.* As if not only the destruction of Hierusalem, but the end of the world were to happen in that age. This is the other difficulty.

But notwithstanding all this, I doubt not, but by comparing the three evangelists together, to make the series and order of these prophecies very clear.

In order whereunto, we are to consider that our SAVIOUR in this prophecy foretels *three things* very distinct in time.

1. The destruction of Hierusalem.

2. The fate and condemnation of the Jewish nation after this desolation, and during their captivity among the Gentiles, among whom they were to be scattered. And this we have clearly and fully express'd by St. Luke xxi. 23, 24. *There shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* So that this prediction comprehends, from the destruction of Jerusalem, all the time of the captivity of the Jews among the Gentiles, which we see is not yet expired, and GOD alone knows how long it shall last. And then,

3. Forerunning signs of the end of the world, which the evangelists say shall happen *after the tribulation of those days*; that is, when GOD had made an end of punishing the nation of the Jews. And this seems to me wholly to clear and take off *the first difficulty*.

As to the *second*, namely, that after the prophecy of the end of the world, we find these words added by our SAVIOUR, *verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled*; which seems to intimate, that the end of the world should happen in that age. For the answering of this, I shall not betake myself to that refuge which some have done, by explaining these words thus, *this generation*, that is, *this nation shall not pass away*, shall not be utterly destroyed, but shall remain scattered up and down the world, as a monument of GOD's displeasure against them,

them, till the end of all things. For though the expression *γενεα αὕτη, this generation*, may well enough be translated *this nation, this race of people*; yet the precedent words will not admit this interpretation; for it is said in the verse immediately before, *so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors*. So that our SAVIOUR speaks of something very near at hand, which necessarily confines it to *that generation*.

Therefore the plain solution of this difficulty is this; that our SAVIOUR ends his prediction of the destruction of Hierusalem, and the end of the world, at the 31st verse; where he says, that *the son of man shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*. And then he makes some reflections upon what he had foretold concerning the destruction of Hierusalem, and the end of the world.

(1.) As to the destruction of Hierusalem, he tells them a *parable of the fig-tree*, that by the putting forth of its leaves, we know that the summer is nigh; so likewise when ye shall see all these things, namely, all those signs which I have given you of the destruction of Hierusalem, know that it is near, even at the doors; and then he adds, *verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, until all these things be fulfilled*; that is, many of those, who are now alive, shall live to see all those signs which I have mentioned. And then,

(2.) He reflects upon his prediction of the end of the world, ver. 36. *but of that day and hour knoweth no man, &c.* that is, not of that other day, of which I have been speaking, namely, of the end of the world, no man knows; as if he had said, the signs which I have given of the destruction of Hierusalem are as plain, as the budding of the fig-tree is a sign of summer: but I have not given such plain signs of the end of the world, and the day of judgment. That I have declared to you in dark allegories of the sun's being darkened, and the moon's not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven, which cannot be understood literally; and the mystical meaning of them is very hidden. And

And thus I hope I have removed those difficulties, and made the order and series of this prophecy very clear.

Secondly, I come in the next place to expound the particulars of this prophecy, so far as it concerns the destruction of Jerusalem, as we find them in the xxivth of St. Matthew, compared with the other two evangelists that wrote of it, St. Mark and St. Luke; and to shew the exact accomplishment of each of these particulars; not only from the tradition of Christians, but from the writings of the Jews and heathens, which are so much the stronger on our side, because they are the testimonies of enemies. And in the expounding of this prophecy, I shall distinctly consider these *three* things.

1. Our SAVIOUR's general prediction of the siege and total destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and of the temple, which you have from the 34th verse of the xxxiii chapter, to the 3d verse of the xxivth.

2. His prediction of the signs that should forerun the destruction of Hierusalem, from verse the 3d, to verse the 21st.

3. The concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it, from verse 21. to ver. 29.

1. Our SAVIOUR's general prediction of the siege of Hierusalem, and of the total destruction of the city. This our SAVIOUR foretels, Luke xix. 41, 42, 43, 44. *And when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and shall lay thee even to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation.* So Josephus tells, lib. vi. that Titus raised a wall round about Hierusalem, and kept them in on every side; so that none could come out, though many thousands were famished with hunger; which was so sad and dismal a calamity, that our SAVIOUR,

VIOUR, though he knew how just a cause there was for it, yet out of very humanity, and tenderness of nature, he could not but, upon the foresight of so sad a destruction, *weep over it*. He indeed expresseth his vehement desire that this might have been prevented, chap. xxiii. 37. *O Hierusalem, Hierusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* Therefore having brought this ruin wilfully upon themselves, he pronounceth the sentence of their desolation, ver. 38. *Behold your house is left unto you desolate!* And at the beginning of the next chapter, when the disciples were shewing him the beautiful structure of the temple, he foretels, that *there should not one stone be left upon another, which should not be thrown down.*

Now that all this was punctually accomplished, Josephus tells us, lib. vii. *Bell. Jud.* that when the Romans had taken the city, Cæsar gave order to lay it waste to the ground, excepting some part of the wall which was left for the guards of soldiers, and three of the strongest towers, which he ordered to be left for a standing monument of the Roman courage: but all the rest of the city was so levelled, that no man, that should come to see it, could believe that it was ever inhabited.

And our SAVIOUR's prediction of the utter ruin of the temple, was most remarkably fulfill'd. For the Roman history tells us, that Turnus Rufus with a plough-share did tear up the foundation of the temple, and left no part of it, not so much as under ground, undissolved. So that our SAVIOUR's prophecy was literally fulfilled, *There was not left one stone upon another, that was not thrown down.*

2. I shall next consider our SAVIOUR's prediction of the signs which should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem, namely, these eight.

First, that there should rise up false and counterfeit Christs or Messias's.

Secondly, great judgments should befall the world, and particularly that nation, not long before that time; there should be wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes in divers places.

Thirdly, fearful sights and signs from heaven.

Fourthly, persecution of the Christians.

Fifthly, that upon this occasion there should be a great apostasy of Christians.

Sixthly, that upon this persecution many false prophets and teachers should arise.

Seventhly, that there should be an universal publication of the gospel before this great desolation should happen.

Eighthly, and lastly, which was to be the most immediate sign and forerunner of their ruin, *the abomination of desolation*, should be seen standing in the holy place. And these you have set down from the 3d verse of this xxivth chapter, to the 21st, which I shall briefly expound, and shew how the event did correspond to the prediction.

Our SAVIOUR having before foretold the destruction of Hierusalem and the temple in general, the disciples come to him, and ask him two questions, *When these things should be? And what should be the sign of his coming?* that is, in judgment to destroy Jerusalem; and what should be the signs of the end of the world? I shall only consider the first, the signs that should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem, as being only pertinent to my present purpose.

First, he foretels there should be false and counterfeit Christs, or Messias's, ver. 3, 4. *Take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name, saying I am CHRIST, and shall deceive many.* This our SAVIOUR gives as one of the first signs; and therefore St. Luke adds, chap. xxi. 8. *The time draweth near*, that is, it should not be long before this sign should appear: and it accordingly happened. Josephus mentions several of these; of whom, though Josephus does not expressly say that they called themselves the MESSIAS, yet he says that which is equivalent, that they undertook to rescue the

the people from the Roman yoke, which was the thing which the Jews expected the MESSIAS should do for them; and therefore we find, Luke xxiv. 21. that the disciples that were going up to Emmaus, and knew not that CHRIST was risen, and were doubtful what to think of him, because it was the third day, they say, *We hoped this had been he that should have redeemed Israel*; that is, they hoped this had been the MESSIAS, that being it seems a common periphrasis of the MESSIAS, that he was *he that was to deliver Israel*. Such an one Theudas pretended himself to be; not that Theudas, of whom Gamaliel speaks Acts xv. 36. but another of the same name, who about twelve years after our SAVIOUR's death, when Cuspius Fadus was procurator of Judea, rose and seduced the people; of whom Josephus, lib. xviii. gives this account, that *being a sorcerer, he rose up and deceived many*; which is the very expression our SAVIOUR useth, *they shall deceive many*. This man persuaded a great multitude to bring their goods and follow him down the river Jordan, which he promised by his command to divide, and to give them a safe passage over it. But whilst he was thus playing the fool among the people, Fadus sent some forces, and surprised him and his company, killing many of them, and cutting off his head, and so there was an end of him.

Such likewise were those impostors, which about two and twenty years after our SAVIOUR's death were so rife among them, when Felix was governor of Judea; of whom Josephus tells us, that they drew multitudes after them into the wilderness, promising to work great signs and wonders before them; which agrees exactly with the description which our SAVIOUR gives of *the false Christs and false Prophets*, ver. 24. where he says, that they should *shew great signs and wonders*, *σημεία καὶ τέρατα*, the very words which Josephus useth. And verse 26. *If they shall say to you, he is in the desert, go not forth*; answerable to what Josephus says, *that they drew many after them into the wilderness*.

Such

Such an one likewise was the Egyptian prophet, who, as Josephus tells, came to Jerusalem much about the same time, and persuaded the people to follow him to mount Olivet, persuading them, that from thence they should see the walls of Jerusalem fall, and so might enter the city. Which Felix understanding, sent soldiers, and slew and took several of them, but the Egyptian impostor himself made an escape; which is the reason of that saying of the chief captain to Paul, Acts xxi. 38. *Art not thou the Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar?* &c.

Such another was that impostor (if he be distinct from the former) who, as Josephus tells us, about three years after, under Festus Portius the procurator, deceived the people with vain promises of deliverance, and ease from their oppressions, if they would follow him into the wilderness: but Festus sent soldiers, and destroyed him, and his company.

And shall deceive many, that is, by raising false expectations in the people, shall draw them into ruin, as Josephus tells us they did many of the Jews. And this our SAVIOUR elsewhere foretold, as a just judgment of GOD upon them for rejecting of him who was the true MESSIAS, John v. 43. *I am come in my FATHER'S name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*

Secondly, the next sign our SAVIOUR gives, is *wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, &c.* ver. 6, 7. *And ye shall bear of wars and rumours of wars.* About this time the Jews began to be set upon in several places, by the command of the emperor, and many thousands of them were slain at Alexandria, and Babylon, as Josephus tells us. And there was a fear, and rumour of a general war denounced against them by Caius Caligula the emperor, unless they would receive his statue into the temple. Upon this rumour the whole nation was in great astonishment, insomuch that the Jews left their business, and neglected to till their grounds, expecting the Romans would have fallen upon them; of which consternation,

on, both Josephus and Philo give us a particular account.

Our SAVIOUR adds, *see that ye be not troubled: for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet*; that is, when you see the nation in this danger from the Romans, be not ye troubled, as the Jews will be, thinking now will be the ruin of the nation. This and many other things will happen, before the final end come. And accordingly it fell out. For so Josephus and Tacitus tell us, that this storm was blown over by the sudden death of the emperor.

Verse 7. *Nation shall rise up against nation.* Which happened under Claudius and Nero, the two next Roman emperors, when in several cities, as Cesarea, Ptolemais, and many others, the Jews and those of other nations that inhabited those cities, fell upon and destroyed one another, as may be read at large in Josephus.

And *kingdom against kingdom.* This seems to refer to the several provinces, or tetrarchies in Palestine, which were also called kingdoms, which at this time had cruel wars against one another; as the Jews and the Galileans against the Samaritans, and several others that Josephus speaks of.

And *there shall be famines and pestilences.* Accordingly Josephus tells us, that under Claudius Cæsar there was a great famine in Judea, namely, that which was prophesied of by Agabus, Acts xi. 28. And this Grotius very probably supposeth to be the reason, why St. Paul in his epistles, written about that time, is so earnest with the Christians to send relief to the saints at Jerusalem. *Pestilences*, they usually follow famine, and *earthquakes in divers places*; which happened in the times of Claudius and Nero. Philostratus speaks of a great earthquake that happened in Crete in the time of Claudius, and in several other places, as Smyrna, Chios, Samos, &c. not long before the destruction of Jerusalem: Tacitus speaks of one in Asia about the same time. And though these were at a greater distance, than the other signs which our SAVIOUR mentions; yet the Jews could not but hear of them, because
several

several of the nation were dispersed into some of those places.

Thirdly, *fearful sights and signs from heaven.* So St. Luke, chap. xxi. ver. 11. *There shall be fearful sights, and great signs from heaven.* Josephus gives us a clear comment upon this, *Bell. Jud.* lib. vii. says he, "This
" wretched people believed impostors and counterfeits,
" but those great signs and prodigies which did forerun
" their desolation, they neither minded, nor believed."

A little before their destruction (he tells us) there hung over their city a fiery sword, which continued for a year together. A little before their rebellion against the Romans, there appeared a comet, which shined so clear in the temple, and about the altar, as if it had been day. And the same day an heifer, that was led to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the middle of the temple. The eastern gate of the temple, which was of massy brass, and very heavy, and could scarce be shut by the strength of twenty men, and was constantly made fast with strong locks and bars, flew open at midnight; which when it was told to the magistrate, and he came to see it, they could scarce get strength enough to shut it. One evening, not long before their desolation, there were seen in the air chariots and armies hovering over the city. At the feast of Pentecost, the priests going one night into the temple, according to their custom, first heard a noise, and afterwards a sudden voice, saying, *Let us go hence.* And which is very terrible, one Jesus, a plain countryman, four years before any troubles began, when the city was in a deep peace, came up to Jerusalem, and upon one of their festivals, began to cry out with a loud voice, *A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, a voice against the people.* And thus he went about crying day and night; and being seized on by the magistrates, and punished and tortured, he would not give over, but still went crying about, *wo, wo, to Jerusalem;* and thus he continued for seven years and five months together, and was nei-

ther weary nor hoarse until the city was besieged, and then he was quiet; but one time went upon the walls, and cried with a loud voice, *wo, wo to the city and the temple, and the people*, and added, *wo also to myself*; and immediately was struck dead by a stone out of a cross-bow.

Were not these *fearful sights and great signs from heaven*? And these we have all related by one of the most prudent historians, who lived at that very time, and that very place; and he says, that many were alive when he wrote, and could attest all this.

Verse 8. *All these are the beginnings of sorrows.* The scripture usually compares the greatest sufferings and afflictions to *the pains of a woman in travail*, to which our SAVIOUR here alludes, and says, these were but the first pangs, nothing to those throws which should come at last.

These are *three* of the signs fore-running the destruction of Jerusalem, which were predicted by our SAVIOUR. There are yet *five* more, which I reserve for my next discourse on this subject.

S E R M O N CCXXXIX.

The evidences of the truth of the
christian religion.

2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

But if our gospel is hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them.

The sixth sermon on this text.

THE *fourth* evidence, which those who lived in our SAVIOUR's time had of his divine authority, was, the spirit of prophecy proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions.

I have given *five* instances of our SAVIOUR's predictions, and am now treating on the *fourth* of them, viz. his foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, with the circumstances of it.

In explaining the particulars of this prophecy, I proposed *three* things to be considered.

1. Our SAVIOUR's general prediction of the siege and total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
2. His prediction of the signs that should forerun it.
3. His prediction of the concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it.

I am upon the *second* of these, viz. our SAVIOUR's prediction of the signs that should forerun the destruction of Jerusalem; *three* of which I have dispatched, and now proceed to those which remain.

Fourthly, another sign which our SAVIOUR foretold, as a forerunner of the destruction of Jerusalem, was

persecution of the Christians, *they shall deliver you to be afflicted, and shall kill you.* St. Mark expresseth it more particularly, Mark xiii. 9. *But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils, and in the Synagogues ye shall be beaten, and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.* And these did partly happen before the forementioned calamities, and partly upon them: but our SAVIOUR first reckons by themselves the common calamities of the nation; and then he comes to those which did concern his disciples and followers; and this follows very fitly upon the former more general calamities. For we find the fathers in their apologies every where complaining, that the Jews and heathens laid the blame of all the judgments and calamities which befel them, as famine, pestilence, and earthquakes, upon the Christians, as the causes of them; and from this pretence they many times took occasion to persecute them.

They shall deliver you to be afflicted. This was fulfilled in delivering some of the apostles to be whipped and imprisoned by the chief priests and rulers, as Peter and John; or given them up to the Roman power, as they did James and Peter to Herod; Paul to Gallio, Felix and Festus, and last of all to Nero.

And shall kill you. St. Luke saith *some of you*; for of others he saith, *that not a hair of their head shall fall to the ground.* Thus Stephen was killed by a popular tumult; and the two James's were put to death under colour of a judicial process; the one stoned by the council of the Jews, and the other put to death by Herod.

And ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. Which began under Nero, who, charging the Christians with the burning of the city, as Tacitus tells us, when himself had set it on fire, tortured many of them as guilty of the fact. *For my name's sake.* This was exactly fulfilled, in that the Christians were so miserably persecuted for no other cause, but for being called Christians. They did not punish them for opposing their idolatry, for that the Jews did as well as the Christians, who

who yet escaped their malice ; nor could they lay any other crime to their charge. Hence was that common saying among the heathens, *Vir bonus Caius Sejus ; tantum modo quod Christianus.*

Fifthly, and upon this persecution, the apostasy of many from Christianity, ver. 10. *Then shall many be offended ;* that is, fall off from Christianity because of these persecutions ; as we read several did, Demas, Her-mogenes, Phygellus, and probably several others.

And they shall betray one another, and hate one another. Which was remarkably fulfilled in the sect of the Gnosticks, who did not only decline persecution themselves, but joined with those that persecuted the Christians, as ecclesiastical history tells us.

Sixthly, that likewise upon this occasion of persecution many false prophets should arise, and deceive many, ver. 11. which seems to refer to Simon Magus, who gave himself out to be the power of God ; and to the other heads of the Gnostick sect. Verse 12. *And the love of many shall grow cold, because iniquity shall abound.* Which seems to refer likewise to the Gnosticks, of whom St. John in his first epistle doth so frequently make mention of their name ; as *be that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, &c.* and of whom he doth so much complain for want of love to their brethren.

Verse 13. *But he that shall endure to the end, shall be saved ;* that is, he that shall continue constant in the profession of the faith, notwithstanding these persecutions and apostasies, and false teachers that shall arise, *shall be saved.*

Seventhly, that there should be an universal publication of the gospel, before this great desolation should happen, ver. 14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations.* And this was accomplished before the destruction of Jerusalem : for the gospel was published all over the Roman empire before that time ; and that is it which is here meant by *the world*, in the same sense that Augustus is said by St. Luke, *to have taxed all the world.*

And this is the very phrase which the Romans constantly used, calling the Roman empire, *Imperium orbis terrarum*. And that the gospel was thus published, we may easily believe, if we consider how many went forth for this purpose, and what indefatigable pains they took in this work, especially St. Paul, who *preached from Jerusalem to Illyricum*, which, according to the account which he gives of the journey, is computed to be no less than 2000 miles, and yet he made considerable stays in many places.

For a witness unto all nations ; that is, that all nations might be convinced of the unreasonable obstinacy of the Jews, before God brought those dreadful calamities upon that nation.

And then shall the end come ; that is, the final destruction of the Jews, the total desolation of the Jewish church and commonwealth, according to the prophecy of Jacob, Gen. xlix. 10. which puts these two signs together, that *the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

Eightily, the last and most immediate sign and forerunner which he gave of their destruction, is *the standing of the abomination of desolation in the holy place*. Verse xv. *When ye shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place ; then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.* There is a great difference among expositors, what is here meant by *the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place*. Some refer it to the statue of Adrian the emperor, placed where the temple was at Jerusalem. But that cannot be, because that was a long time after the destruction of Jerusalem, and therefore could not be given by our SAVIOUR for a sign and forerunner of it. Others (as Capellus) refer it to the faction of the zealots, which before Titus came to besiege Jerusalem, seized upon the temple, and profaned it by bloodshed and slaughter, and made so horrible a devastation in the city. And this would not be improbable, if St. Luke had not given us so clear an interpretation

tation of it, Luke xxi. 20, 21. who instead of *the abomination of desolation*, mentioned by St. Matthew and St. Mark, puts *the Roman armies*. And when ye shall see *Jerusalem compassed with armies*, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them that are in *Judea* flee to the mountains. So that according to St. Luke, the *abomination of desolation* standing in the holy place, is the *Roman armies compassing Jerusalem*; which therefore is called *the abomination of desolation*, because it would cause so great a desolation among them. When ye see *Jerusalem compassed with armies*, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh: and it is said to stand in the holy place, because Jerusalem was the holy city, and so many furlongs about it were accounted holy. Now when the Roman army should approach within the limits of the holy ground, then *the abomination of desolation* might be said to stand in the holy place: but the word *abomination* seems particularly to refer to *the Roman ensigs*, upon which were the images of their emperors, which the Romans worshipped, as Suetonius expressly tells us; and Tacitus calls them their *bellorum dii*, their gods of war. Now it was an *abomination* to the Jews to see these idols set up within the limits of the holy city. To which I may add what Josephus tells us afterward, that the Romans, after they had conquered the city, set up these ensigs in the ruins of the temple, and sacrificed to them.

Verse 15. *Then let them that be in Judea, flee to the mountains; and let him which is on the house top, not come down to take any thing out of his house; neither let him which is in the field, return back to take his cloaths;* which are several expressions to signify what haste the Christians would make, when they saw the Romans making so near approaches to Jerusalem.

Let them which are in Judea, flee to the mountains. Some refer this to the last siege by Titus: but I see no probability for that; for the Jews did not permit any to go out of the city. Others refer it to Vespasian's drawing his forces toward Jerusalem some time before the siege, but hearing of the death of Nero the emperor,

peror, he forbore to besiege it, until he had received orders from the new emperor; and that this was a warning to the Christians, and they took their opportunity then to flee to the mountains. But this could not be neither, because for a good while before, the faction of the zealots under John and Simon's faction, who lay without the city, did slay all who endeavoured to escape out of the city. If we limit these words to Jerusalem, (which the text does not) the most probable time was when Jerusalem was first compassed by the Roman army under Cestius Gallus, who afterward withdrew his siege: and then indeed those that would, had liberty to flee away. And at this time Josephus doth say, that many did flee, foreseeing the approaching danger. But there is no reason to confine it to Jerusalem: for our SAVIOUR's words are more large, *then let them that are in Judea, flee to the mountains*. And if so, there is an express passage in Josephus to this purpose, that when Titus was drawing up his forces toward Jerusalem, a great number of those who were at Jericho went from thence *eis τὰ ὄρη*, into the mountainous places, and thereby consulted their own safety.

Verse 15. *Let him that is on the house top not come to take any thing from thence*. Our SAVIOUR alludes to the fashion of the Jewish houses, which had plain roofs, upon which they used to walk; and he bids them make such haste, that when they saw this sign, they should not think of saving any thing in their houses, but betake themselves presently to the mountains for safety.

Verse 16. *Neither let him that is in the field return back to take his cloaths*. Another expression to signify what haste they should make from the approaching danger.

Verse 17. *But wo unto them that are with child, and to those that give suck in those days*; because of the impediment that this would be to their flight. Or possibly it may refer to the dreadful story, not parallel'd in any place or age, which Josephus tells of one Mary, who in the time of the siege, out of very famine, boiled her sucking child, and eat it. And therefore St. Luke xxi. 23.

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does mention this of *the women's being with child*, not as an impediment to flight, but as an instance of the great calamity that should befall them. Luke xxi. 23. *But wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days : for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.*

Verse 18. *But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter ; nor on the sabbath-day.* Not in winter, because of the hardness of the season, and the difficulty of travelling and living upon the mountains : *nor on the sabbath-day.* This concerned the christian Jews as well as others, most of which observed the Jewish law and rites after our SAVIOUR's death, till the desolation of the Jewish state and temple, as appears out of the history of the Acts. For though St. Paul stood for the liberty of the Gentiles ; yet it appears from Acts xxi. 21. that he vindicated himself from the calumny or aspersion which was cast upon him, as if he taught the Jews which were among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses, and that they ought not to circumcise their children, nor to walk after their customs. So that the christian Jews retaining the observance of the Jewish sabbath, upon which it was not lawful to go any farther than a sabbath-day's journey, which was scarce two miles ; if the danger should happen at that time (as the Romans usually took advantage to make all their onsets on that day, knowing the superstition of the Jews in that point) they must needs have been in great perplexity.

Having thus particularly treated of the signs which our SAVIOUR foretold, as the forerunners of the destruction of Jerusalem ; I proceed,

3. To consider the concomitant and subsequent circumstances of it. As,

1. The unparallel'd greatness of their calamity.
2. The arising of false Christs.
3. Their being led into captivity, and dispersed up and down the world.
4. Their continuance in this captivity and dispersed state out of their country, till the gospel had had its course among the Gentiles.

1. The

1. The unparallel'd greatness of their calamity and destruction, ver. 19. *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, neither ever shall be.* This is a very material circumstance in this prophecy, that the calamity of the Jews should be so strange and unparallel'd, as never was in the world before: for though it might easily have been foretold from the temper of the people, which was prone to sedition, that they were very like to provoke the Romans against them; yet there was no probability that all things should have come to that extremity: for it was not the design of the Roman government to destroy any of those provinces which were under them, but only to keep them in subjection, and reduce them by reasonable severity in case of revolt. But that such a calamity should have happened to them under Titus, who was the mildest, and farthest from severity of all mankind, nothing was more unlikely; and that any people should conspire together to their own ruin, and so blindly and obstinately run themselves into such calamities, as made them the pity of their enemies, was the most incredible thing; so that nothing less than a prophetic spirit could have foretold so contingent and improbable a thing as this was.

St. Luke expresseth the dismal calamity that should happen to them in other words, but much to the same sense, Luke xxi. 22, 23. *For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But wo unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.* And to this Josephus fully gives testimony, as will appear both by what he says in general concerning their calamity, and by the particular account of their miseries and sufferings.

(1.) In general he tells us, that *never was any age so fruitful of misery as this was*; and almost in our SAVIOUR's words, in his preface to his books of the siege of Jerusalem, he says, that *all the calamities that had fallen upon any nation from the beginning of the world,*

world, were but small in comparison of what happened to the nation of the Jews in that age. And in his sixth book he says, that as there was never any nation so wicked, so never any nation suffered such calamitous accidents. But this will best appear,

(2.) By a brief and particular enumeration of their calamities. Not to mention the burning and destroying of several of their chief cities, as Zabulon, Gadara, Japha, Jotopatah, Joppo, and several others; I shall insist chiefly upon the sufferings of the people themselves, by their tumults and seditions against the Romans. Before the coming of Vespasian, there were slain at Jerusalem and in Syria 2000, at Askalon 2500, at Ptolemais 2000, at Alexandria 5000, at Joppa 8400, at mount Asamon 2000, at Damascus 10000, and afterward at Askalon, by Antonius a Roman commander, 18000; in all, almost one hundred thousand.

By Vespasian in Galilee and other parts, very great numbers; at Japha 15000, at mount Gerizim 11600, at Jotapata (the city of which Josephus our historian was governor) 40000, at Joppa 4000, at Tarichæa near upon 8000, at Gamala 9000, at Giscala 2000; in all fourscore and ten thousand.

Afterward by their own seditions at Jerusalem 8500 at several times; and afterward by the faction of the zealots 12000 of the chiefest and noblest of the citizens were slain at one time; at the river Jordan by Placidus 13000, besides many thousands drowned, so that the river was filled up almost with dead carcasses. At two towns in Idumea by Vespasian 10000, at Gerasa 1000; in all, forty-five thousand.

Whilst Vespasian was thus wasting the cities of Judea, the faction of the zealots filled all places at Jerusalem, even the temple itself, with continual slaughters; and after they had conquered Ananus, who stood for the people against the zealots, and got all into their own hands; they were divided into parties, and made slaughter of one another; and one party let in Simon, who headed a seditious multitude, which he brought out of the country; and after that they were subdivided into three parties,

parties, John's, and Eleazer's, and Simon's, which held several parts of the city, and day and night continued to destroy one another; in which seditions all their granaries of corn, and magazines of arms were burnt; so that though provision had been laid in the city, that would have sufficed for several years, yet before they came to be besieged by Titus, they were almost reduced to famine.

And after they were besieged, at the first they united a little against the Romans; yet after a few days, they divided again into factions, and more of them were slain by one another's hand, and with more cruelty than by the Romans; insomuch that Titus, the general of the Romans, wept several times, to consider the miseries they brought upon themselves, and their very enemies were more pitiful towards them, than they to one another.

After two month's siege, the famine began to rage within, and then all manner of cruelties were exercised by the soldiers upon that miserable people; and at last they were brought to such necessity, that many endeavoured to flee out to the enemy, and yet were not permitted; but as many as were suspected of any endeavour to escape, were cruelly killed. It is not to be imagined what barbarous inhumanities, in those straits, all exercised one toward another; snatching the meat out of one another's mouths, and from their dearest friends, and their very children.

And so obstinate were they, that neither those calamities which they suffered, nor the severity of the Romans in crucifying many thousands of them before the walls, and threatening them all with the same death, in case they would not yield, in ripping open the bowels of two thousand of them in a night, who fled out of Jerusalem, upon a report that they had swallowed gold (as many of them had) Josephus, lib. vi. cap. xv. nor all the kind messages of Titus, offering peace to them, and using all manner of intreaties and persuasions not to run upon their own ruin, could prevail with them to accept of a peace. And thus they continued, till by

famine and force the city was taken, and then their provocation of the Romans to cruelty toward those they had got into their power, was so great, that Titus was not able to with-hold the soldiers from exercising great cruelties toward them.

In short, from the beginning of the siege, to the taking of the city, there were famished and slain by the factions among themselves, and by the Romans, 1100000, the greatest number, and with the saddest circumstances, that is to be read of in any story.

Was not this *a time of great tribulation*? Were not these *days of vengeance* indeed? Was there ever a sadder accomplishment of any prediction, than these words of our SAVIOUR had?

And after all this, the temple was burnt and made desolate, the whole city destroyed, and all their whole land seized by the Roman emperor, and the remnant of the people in other parts of the nation were persecuted with great severity. Great numbers of Jews were destroyed at the taking the castle of Herodion, and Mechærus, and Massada, and in the thickets or wood of Jandes. And there were great slaughters of the Jews in other parts, at Antioch, in all places about Alexandria and Thebes, and at Cyrene, so that it was visible that there was *wrath upon this people*.

Verse 22. *And except that the LORD had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elects sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days*; that is, if those calamities had lasted a little longer, there would not one Jew have been left alive; *but for the elects sake*, that is for the sake of those Christians who were left among them, *those days were shortened*; God inclining the heart of Titus to shew pity toward the remnant, and not to suffer the nations to exercise any more cruelty toward them; particularly at Antioch (the first seat of the Christians) Josephus tells us, that when Titus came thither, the people petitioned him earnestly that they might expel the Jews, but he told them that was unreasonable, for now their country was laid waste, there was no place for them to go to.

Thus we see how for the elect sake those days were shortened.

2. Another circumstance which was to follow the destruction of Jerusalem, was, *the arising of false Christs, and false prophets*, ver. 23, 24. *And then, if any man shall say to you, lo, here is CHRIST, or, lo, he is there! believe him not. For false Christs, and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders.* Such was Jonathan, who presently after the destruction of Jerusalem, as Josephus tells us, drew many into the wilderness of Cyrene, pretending that he would shew signs and wonders to them; therefore our SAVIOUR adds, ver. 25, 26. *Behold I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, behold, he is in the desert; go not forth.* There appeared in Egypt, Crete and Cyprus, several other impostors, who gave out themselves to be Christs and false prophets, who applied the prophecies of the old testament to these counterfeit Messias's; as they did that of Balaam concerning *a star coming out of Jacob*, to Barchochebas, because his name signified *the son of a star*. And this was a notorious impostor in the time of Adrian the emperor, not many years after the destruction of Jerusalem, about twenty (as I remember) Eusebius counts; he had a great multitude followed him, which put to death many Christians, because they would not renounce CHRIST, and join with them against the Romans, and that was the cause of the death of some hundred thousands of them.

3. Another subsequent circumstance, was the Jews being led into captivity, and dispersed into all nations. This St. Luke adds, Luke xxi. 24. *They shall be led away captive into all nations.* I need not prove this out of history, we see the effect of it to this day.

4. That they should continue in this captivity and dispersed state, and their city remain in the power of the Gentiles, *until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.* So also St. Luke tells us, ver. 24. *They shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled; that is, till the gospel have had its course among*

among the nations. And thus it is still with them at this day; Jerusalem is in the hands of other nations, and the captivity of the Jews continues; and when it shall end, God alone knows.

Having thus explained the particulars of our SAVIOUR's prediction, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, I should in the next place proceed to make some reflections upon this prediction, and its punctual accomplishment; but this I reserve for the following discourse.

S E R M O N CCXL.

The evidences of the truth of the christian religion.

2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The seventh sermon on this text.

I N discoursing on the *fourth* evidence which those who lived in our SAVIOUR's time had of his divine authority, viz. the spirit of prophecy proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions, I came to consider that remarkable prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem.

In doing this, I proposed *three* things.

First, to explain the series and order of this prediction.

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Secondly,

Secondly, to consider the particulars of it, as we find them in the 24th of St. Matthew, compared with the other two evangelists.

Thirdly, to make some reflections upon this prediction, and its punctual accomplishment. The *two* former of these I have dispatched, and now proceed to what remains, viz. the

Third thing I propounded, which was to make some reflections upon this prediction of our SAVIOUR's, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and the punctual accomplishment of it. And now that I have been so large in the explication of this prophecy, I shall make use of this argument farther than I intended, not only to shew, that those who lived in that age, and saw our SAVIOUR's predictions so punctually answered by the event, might from hence be satisfied of the prophetick spirit of our SAVIOUR, and consequently of his divine authority; but likewise to shew of what force to the conviction of the Jews this consideration is, of the destruction of Jerusalem, and that long train of miserable consequences which followed upon it, and have lasted to this day.

And the reflections I shall make upon this shall be these.

I. That nothing less than a prophetick spirit could so punctually have foretold so many contingents, and improbable things, as this prediction of our SAVIOUR's does contain in it. Such were some of those signs which did forerun the destruction of Jerusalem; as the great famine which happened under Claudius; the several great earthquakes under Claudius and Nero; the universal publication of the gospel all over the Roman empire in so short a space; those wonderful sights, and prodigious signs from heaven, so strange, as are not to be parallel'd in any history. And such likewise were the circumstances of the destruction of the city and the temple; as that it should be an utter desolation, which was strangely accomplished, when, as Josephus tells us, the very mountain upon which the temple stood, was almost burnt up and consumed with the fierceness

ness of the fire; and the Roman history gives account of the plucking up of the very foundations of the temple by Rufus Turnus: but the most remarkable circumstance of all, which is so fully expressed by our SAVIOUR in this prediction, was the strange and unexampled calamities which should attend this destruction, such as never befel any people before, which our SAVIOUR foretels in these words, *then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time; nor ever shall be.* And never had any words a more sad and full accomplishment than this part of our SAVIOUR's prophecy had, in those woful miseries which befel that people by civil and intestine seditions, and the utmost extremity that famine could reduce a people to; besides the cruelties of a foreign enemy. No history makes mention of so vast a number of men, that in so short a time did perish in such sad circumstances; fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand within less than a year's space, and more of these by far, cruelly murdered by one another's hands, than by the Romans. So that these were *days of vengeance, and of great tribulation*, such as the world had never seen before, and *if they had not been shortened, no flesh could have been saved*, as our SAVIOUR adds in the prophecy; if things had gone on at that rate a little longer, not one of the Jewish nation would have been left alive.

Now that our SAVIOUR should foretel so punctually the sad calamity of this people, I take to be one of the most material circumstances of this prophecy; and to be a thing so contingent and unlucky, that it could not have been foreseen, but by divine inspiration. For though one might easily have foretold from the temper of the people, which was prone to sedition, and very impatient of the Roman government, that the Jews were very likely in a short time to provoke the Romans against them; yet there was no probability at all, that things should have come to that extremity; for it was not in the design of the Roman government to destroy any of their provinces: but that such a calamity should

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have happened unto them under Titus, who was the mildest, and farthest from cruelty of all mankind, nothing was more unlikely; that ever any people should have been so besotted, as the Jews were at that time, and have so madly conspired together to their own ruin, as they did; that they should so blindly and obstinately run themselves into such calamities, as made them the pity of their very enemies, was the most incredible thing in the world. Nothing but a prophetick spirit could have foretold an event so contingent, and so extremely improbable.

II. Not only those who lived in that age were capable of satisfaction concerning the accomplishment of this prediction of our SAVIOUR; but that we also might receive full satisfaction concerning this, the providence of God hath so ordered it, as to preserve to us a more punctual and credible history of the destruction of Jerusalem, than there is of any other matter whatsoever so long since done.

And this is more considerable, than possibly at first we may imagine. For,

1. We have this matter related, not by a Christian (who might have been suspected of partiality, and a design to have parallel'd the event with our SAVIOUR's prediction) but by a Jew both by nation and religion, who seems designedly to have avoided, as much as possibly he could, the very mention of the christian name, and all particulars relating to our SAVIOUR, though no historian was ever more punctual in all other things.

2. We have this matter related by one that was an eye-witness of all those sad calamities that beset the nation of the Jews, and during the war in Galilee against Vespasian, was one of their chief commanders, and being taken by the Romans, was in their camp all the time that Jerusalem was besieged.

3. As he was an eye-witness, and so able to give the truest account of those matters, so hath he always had the repute of a most faithful historian. Joseph Scaliger, who was a very good judge in these matters,

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gives this character of him, that he was *diligentissimus* καὶ φιλαλησθέστατος, *omnium Scriptorum*; the most painful historian, and the greatest lover of truth, of any that he had ever read; *de quo nos hoc audacter dicimus, non solum in rebus Judaicis, sed etiam in externis, tutius illi credi quàm omnibus Græcis & Latinis historicis*; of whom, says he, I might confidently affirm, that not only in the Jewish affairs, but in all foreign matters, one may more safely rely upon his credit, than upon all the Greek and Latin historians put together.

4. There is no ancient history extant, that relates any matter with so much particularity of circumstances, as Josephus does this of the Jewish wars, especially the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

5. That the providence of God may appear the more remarkable in this history, which is the only punctual one that hath been preserved down to us of this great action, it will be worth our observation to consider, how remarkably this person was preserved for the writing of this history.

When Vespasian made war upon Galilee, Josephus was chief commander there, and was besieged there by Vespasian, in the city Jotapata, which after a long and stout resistance being taken by the Romans, he with forty more hid themselves in a cave, where at last they were discovered by the Romans; which Vespasian hearing of, sent and offered them life; and Josephus would have accepted of their offer, but the rest would not permit him to yield himself, but threatened to kill him; and when by no persuasions he could take them off from this obstinate resolution, he was glad to propound this to them, that they should cast lots, two by two, who should die first, and he that had the second lot should kill the first, and the next him, and so on, and the last should kill himself. The providence of God preserved Josephus and another to the last lot; and when all the rest were killed, Josephus persuaded him to yield up himself to the Romans, and so they two escaped with their lives, by which remarkable providence he was preserved to write this history.

III. It seems very plain from this relation which Josephus gives, that the Jewish nation were remarkably devoted by God to destruction, and most fatally hardened and blinded to their own ruin. This Josephus every where takes notice of, that there was a sad and black fate hung over the nation, and God seemed to have determined their ruin. And after the destruction of Jerusalem, when the castle of Massada was besieged by the Romans, Eleazer the governor, in his speech to the soldiers, reckons up the sad symptoms of God's displeasure against them; and tells them, that from the beginning of the war it was easy for any one to conjecture that God in great wrath had devoted the nation, which he formerly loved, to destruction.

And indeed all along the hand of God was very visible against them; for when in the beginning of their rebellion Cestius Gallus, the Roman commander, had an opportunity to have taken Jerusalem, and to have put an end to the war, Josephus tells us, that God being angry with them would not permit it, but did reserve them for a greater and sadder destruction. And afterward when Vespasian renewed the war against them, Josephus tells us, that he used all kind of earnest persuasion with his countrymen to prevent their ruin by submitting to the Roman government; but they were obstinate, and would not hearken to any moderate counsels. And when the sedition of the zealots began in Jerusalem, Josephus takes notice, that all the wisest men among them, and those who were most likely, by their interest, and moderation, to have saved the city, were first of all cut off by the zealots; so that there were none left to persuade the people to moderate things.

They provoked the Romans against them all manner of ways; their seditions among themselves continued when the enemy was before their walls; and when in probability they might have held out so long as to have wearied the Romans, by their own seditions they burnt all their granaries, and provisions of corn, and magazines of arms, as if they had consulted the advantage of

of the Romans against themselves: and which was very remarkable, Josephus tells us, that before the siege the fountain of Siloam was almost dried up, and all the springs about Jerusalem, so that water bore a great price; but as soon as Titus came before Jerusalem, the springs brake out again, and there was never greater plenty; which if it had not happened, the Roman armies could very hardly have subsisted. And after the temple was destroyed, when Titus would have given John and Simon, and the rest of the zealots their lives, they would not submit, but were all destroyed by their own obstinacy. At Massada, rather than yield to the Romans, 900 men, women, and children, killed one another, so that when the Romans entered the castle, they found them all dead, except one woman and a child, that had hid themselves.

Philostratus tells us, that when some of the nearer nations would have crowned Titus for his victories over the Jews, he refused it, saying, that he deserved nothing upon that account, for it was not his work, but God had made him the instrument of his wrath against that people. So that there were never greater acknowledgments of a divine hand against any people, than at this time against the Jews. Never was there greater courage and contempt of death in any people; and yet they were conquered by numbers much inferior to them. Never was any soldier so merciful as Titus was, and so solicitous to have spared the effusion of blood; and yet he was necessitated against his nature to exercise great cruelties toward them. Many times he endeavoured by the most severe inhibitions to restrain the cruelties of the soldiers toward them; and when he found that they ripped open the bowels of the Jews who fled out of Jerusalem, in hopes to find gold which they had swallowed, he was much enraged against the soldiers, and would have put all to death that were engaged in that cruelty, but that he found them so many; and notwithstanding this, when he forbade the like cruelty to be exercised for the future, under the most severe Penalties, yet Josephus says, that the soldiers did not forbear

bear privately to do it ; and though in other cases, such a severe prohibition would have taken place, yet says he, because God had devoted that people to ruin, all the ways which Titus used for the saving of them, turned to their destruction, lib. vi. cap. xv. Nay there was as much blood shed by the dissensions among themselves, between those who desired peace with the Romans, and those that would not hearken to it, as by the Romans. So much reason was there for that passionate wish of our SAVIOUR's concerning Jerusalem, *O that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes.* Never was any nation so infatuated ; never was the things that tended to peace so strangely hid from any people, as from the Jews.

IV. It must needs be, that it was for some very great sin that God sent those dreadful calamities upon that nation. Josephus says, that it was sure for some greater impiety, than that nation were guilty of, when they were carried away captive to Babylon. Nay, he says that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, were but small in comparison of those the Jews were guilty of ; so that he says, that they were so ripe for destruction, that if the Roman army had not come when it did, he did verily believe that either an earthquake would have swallowed up the city, or a deluge overflowed them, or fire from heaven have consumed them ; which is very much the same with that the apostle says of them, *1 Thess. ii. 16. that they were filling up the measure of their sins, that wrath might come upon them to the uttermost.*

Now what can we imagine their great sin should be at that time ? All along the history of the old testament, usually the great sin whereby they provoked God, was their idolatry, for which God sent many judgments upon them, and at last sold them into captivity. But when this desolation came upon them, and for a long time before, even after the captivity, they had been free from that great transgression, and were mightily bent against idolatry, so that they would rather die than commit that sin.

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The account which Josephus gives of their sin, was their intestine seditions, and the cruelties and profanations of the temple that were consequent upon them. But that this could not be the original provocation, is plain, because by the acknowledgment of Josephus, and the Jews themselves, this was the greatest judgment and calamity that came upon them; yea much greater than any thing which they suffered by the Romans; yea so great, that it rendered them the pity of their very enemies; and when the Romans would have granted peace to them, and gladly have put an end to those miseries they saw them involved in, yet they continued their intestine seditions, and would not be taken off from destroying one another.

Let them then give us any probable account, for what great sin it was, that God first gave them up to this great judgment of an industrious endeavour to destroy one another: or if they cannot, let them believe the account which the history of the new testament gives of it, and the truth whereof was so remarkably confirmed by the fulfilling of our SAVIOUR's predictions against them. The apostle gives a clear account of their sin, in the forementioned place, *Thess. ii. 15, 16.* that it was because *they had killed the LORD JESUS, and their own prophets, and persecuted the apostles*: by these steps they filled up their sins, and wrath came upon them to the uttermost.

V. The punishment that was inflicted upon them with very shrewd marks and signatures upon it, from which it is easy to conjecture, for what sin it was that they were thus punished. Titus laid his siege to Jerusalem at the very same time and season that the Jews crucified CHRIST, namely, at the time of the passover; and the very day that he began his siege, he crucified before their walls, and afterward, almost the only cruelty that the Romans exercised toward them by the command and permission of Titus, was crucifixion; in such manner that sometimes five hundred were crucified in a day, till they wanted wood for crosses. So that they earnestly cried out against our SAVIOUR, *crucify, crucify,*

crucify, had at last enough; God made them eat the fruit of their own ways, and filled them with their own devices: and they who had bought CHRIST for thirty pieces of silver, were afterward themselves sold at a lower rate.

VI. Their religion was remarkably struck at, and affronted, as if God intended to put an end to that dispensation, and to abrogate their law. Most of their great calamities happened to them on the sabbath-day, and upon their great festivals. Cestius Gallus sat down with his army before Jerusalem on the sabbath. Titus besieged them at the time of the passover. And Jerusalem was taken (as Dio in his Roman history observes) on the sabbath-day, that day for which the Jews have so great a veneration. The zealots profaned the temple by making it a garison, and by the rapine and bloodshed committed in it; they brought the priesthood into contempt, by chusing the meanest of the people into the highest offices; they turned the materials of the temple into instruments of war. The Romans themselves were as much grieved to see how the Jews profaned the temple, as the Jews themselves ought to have been, if it had been so profaned by the Romans; they are the very words of Josephus. And though Titus gave express orders, and used great endeavours to have saved the temple, and hazarded himself to have quenched it when it was on fire; yet he could not do it, but it was burnt to the ground: and afterward when the priests came to him, and supplicated to him for their lives, contrary to his usual clemency, he commanded them to be slain, saying they came too late; that it was fit they should perish with the temple, and now that was destroyed, for the sake of which they should have been saved, he saw no reason to spare them. Afterward the Roman ensigns were set up upon the ruins of the temple, and the soldiers sacrificed to them; and their law was carried in triumph at Rome before Vespasian and Titus.

These were as great signs as could be, that God had a design to abrogate and put a period to that administration

stration ; especially if we take in this, which Ammianus Marcellinus a heathen historian tells us, that this temple could never be rebuilt, though it was attempted by the Jews several times, and that whenever they went about to lay the foundation, fire broke out of the foundation and consumed the workmen.

I will but add one circumstance more, to shew that that dispensation was at an end. God seemed to have wholly given over his particular care of that people, and to have no longer regard to the covenant made with them, in which he had promised, that when they came up three times a year, from all parts of the land, to serve the LORD, he would so order things by his providence, that the enemy should make no advantage of their absence from their borders ; nay the enemy should not then desire their land : and yet notwithstanding this, at the time of the passover, when the whole nation were met at Jerusalem, Titus came upon them, and enclosed them all in the city.

VII. And lastly, consider how God hath pursued the Jews with great severity ever since, making them to be stigmatized and hated in all nations ; great cruelties and oppressions have frequently been exercised toward them ; and by a strange providence, God hath kept them distinct from other people, that they might remain as a monument of his displeasure : and considering how other colonies of people have fallen in, and been mixt with the inhabitants in an age or two, so as they could never be kept distinct for any long time ; that the Jews for 1600 years, should still remain so, as it is an argument of the special providence of God, so it is one of the most material and standing evidences of the truth of our religion, that they should remain still as witnesses of the old testament ; and as monuments of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the fierce wrath which God executed upon them for the crucifying of CHRIST.

Upon the whole matter, if so particular a prediction as this of our SAVIOUR's concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, so punctually answered by the event, be not an argument of divine inspiration, then there can be no

evidence of any such thing as a spirit of prophecy. For what greater evidence of a true prophet, than to foretel so many things, so contingent and improbable, all which have accordingly afterward fallen out, just as they were foretold ?

Suppose the Jews say true, that JESUS CHRIST was an impostor, and consequently justly put to death by them ; what greater reflection upon the providence of GOD can be imagined, than that this person should be permitted to foretel, that such and such calamities should befall those that had put him to death, as a punishment upon them for that sin ; and afterward all this should happen in so remarkable a manner, as the world cannot give the like instance ? is it in the least credible, that the divine providence should permit such things, as of necessity will give credit to an impostor, and would be good evidence to a prudent and considerate man, that he was divinely inspired ?

I have now done with the *fourth* head of our SAVIOUR's predictions, namely, his prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem ; which I have been the longer upon, because it is so considerable an evidence of the truth of our religion, and so strong an argument against the Jews, that if they are not wrought upon by the consideration of the accomplishment of this prediction of our SAVIOUR's, and the great severity of GOD still continued toward that nation, it can be ascribed to nothing but the just judgment of GOD, still *biding the things of their peace from their eyes*, and giving them up to the same kind of fatal hardness and blindness, which sixteen hundred years ago was the cause of their destruction.

There remains yet one instance more of our SAVIOUR's prophetick spirit, which I must reserve for another discourse.

S E R M O N CCXLI.

The evidences of the truth of the christian religion.

2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them.

The eighth sermon on this text.

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I Am still upon the *fourth* evidence, which those who lived in our SAVIOUR's time had of his divine authority, *viz.* The spirit of prophecy proved to be in him, and made good by the accomplishment of his predictions. *Four* instances I have already given, and now proceed to the

Fifth and *last* instance I shall give of our SAVIOUR's prophetick spirit, *viz.* in those predictions which foretel the fate of the gospel in the world; what discouragements and difficulties the first publishers of the gospel should meet with from the persecution which the powers of the world should stir up against them, and from the rising of false christs and false prophets; what assistance they should find in the carrying on of the work; and what success the gospel should have, notwithstanding the opposition that should be made against it. I shall speak briefly to these.

I. What discouragements and difficulties the first publishers of the gospel should meet with. Our SAVIOUR foretels *two* great discouragements.

1. From the persecutions which the powers of the world should stir up against them. This our SAVIOUR gave his disciples early notice of, when he first called them together, and sent them forth, *Matt. x. 16, 17, 18. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake. And ver. 21, 22. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my names sake.* And that the disciples might not be surprized with this, when it should happen, as an unexpected thing, a little before his death, when he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he repeats this prediction to them again, as you may see *Matt. xxiv. 9. Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my names sake. And Luke xxi. 12. But before all they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my names sake.*

All this we find punctually fulfilled in those persecutions that they met with at Jerusalem, and in other places wherever they went to preach the gospel, as you may read at large in the history of the Acts of the apostles. And afterward in the persecutions raised against the Christians by the Roman emperors, wherein all kind of cruelties and tortures were exercised upon them, and the Christians killed by thousands in a day, as if they would have destroyed the very name of CHRIST out of the world, as every one knows that is acquainted with ecclesiastical history.

Particularly he foretold the two sons of Zebedee James and John, that they should be put to death, *Matt. xx. 23. saith he unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.* And this accordingly happened to them, for we find *Acts xii. 2. that James was slain by Herod.* Indeed

St. John lived a great while after, as our SAVIOUR foretold, *John xxi. 22. That John should tarry till he came*; that is, he should live till the destruction of Jerusalem, which is very frequently in the evangelists called CHRIST's coming; and so he did, and at last was put to death by the sword, as St. Chrysostom saith; though Justin, Irenæus, Clemens Alex. say nothing of it; and Origen and Tertullian say he died another death.

He likewise foretold Peter what kind of death he should die, namely that when he was old he should be crucified, *John xxi. 18, 19. Verily, verily I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thy self, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.* And the evangelist adds, *This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.* And accordingly he was crucified about forty years after, as Eusebius tells us, and several of the fathers.

2. Another great discouragement which our SAVIOUR foretold they should meet with in the publishing of the gospel, was, from the rising of false christs and false prophets. This our SAVIOUR foretels in the 24th of St. *Matth. ver. 5. 24. That many should come in his name, and should deceive many*; that there should arise false christs, and false prophets, and shew great signs and wonders; *insomuch, that, if it were possible, they should deceive the very elect.* And this I have already shewn was fulfilled in those many impostures, that rose up among the Jews, pretending themselves to be Messias's, and drawing many people after them, both before and after the destruction of Jerusalem; and in Simon and the other heads of the Gnostick sect, who did great prejudice to christianity, by turning the grace of God into wantonness, and abusing the holy doctrine of our SAVIOUR to all manner of licentiousness, and drawing of Christians, not only to loose and filthy practices, but to a denial of the gospel for fear of persecution, and at last to join with the heathens in the persecuting of the Christians.

II. Our SAVIOUR likewise foretold what assistance the apostles should find in the carrying on their work. He promised that *he would be with them* in the preaching of the gospel, *Matth. xxviii. 20.* More particularly before his ascension, he told them that they should *receive power by the coming of the HOLY GHOST upon them*, whereby they should be qualified to be *witnesses unto him, in Judea, and Jerusalem, and Samaria, and to the utmost parts of the earth*, *Acts i. 8.* And *Matth. x. 19, 20.* our SAVIOUR promiseth that his spirit should direct them what to say, when they should be accused before kings and governors, *when they deliver you up, take no thought how, or what ye shall speak : for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* For it is not you that speak ; but the spirit of your father which speaketh in you. And again to the same purpose, he encourageth them a little before his death, *Luke xxi. 14, 15.* *Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist.*

And all this we find was made good to them after our SAVIOUR's ascension. They were wonderfully assisted, and carried on above themselves in the preaching of the gospel. So the evangelist St. Mark tells us, *Mark xvi. 20.* that the apostles *went forth, and preached every where, the LORD working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* And all along in the history of the Acts, we find that they were extraordinarily strengthened and assisted in the publishing of the gospel. And particularly our SAVIOUR's prediction and promise was made good to St. Stephen, of whom it is said, *Acts vi. 10.* that when he was disputing with the Jews, *they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

III. Our SAVIOUR foretold also what success the gospel should have, notwithstanding all the opposition that should be made against it ; that it should be *published in all nations*, *Matth. xxiv. 14.* and in despite of all the malice of the Jews, and the potent opposition that

the Gentiles should make against the publishers of the gospel, they should *make disciples in every nation, and bear witness unto CHRIST to the uttermost parts of the earth*, Matth. xxviii. 19. and Acts i. 8. That he would *build his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell should not prevail against it*, Matth. xvi. 18. And this we find was done with great success, both among the Jews and Gentiles, as appears out of the history of the Acts of the apostles, and other histories of the first ages of the church.

Particularly our SAVIOUR foretold that that act of kindness which Mary shewed to him, in anointing his head with precious ointment, should be remembered wherever the gospel was preached, *Matth. xxvi. 13. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.* And accordingly this little particular history hath every where been propagated with the gospel, and the fame of it hath spread as far as the notice of christianity.

And thus I have done with the *fourth* and last evidence of our SAVIOUR's divine authority, namely, the prophetick spirit which was proved to be in him, and made good by the punctual accomplishment of his predictions. I shall only shew that these instances which I have given, are clear arguments of a prophetick spirit in our SAVIOUR. And this will appear, if we consider these two things.

First, that all these things which our SAVIOUR foretold, were purely contingent in respect to us; that is, there was no necessity that they should come to pass; and consequently, nothing but infinite knowledge could certainly foresee that they would.

Secondly, all or most of them, were not only contingent, but exceeding unlikely; there was no probability that they should happen; and consequently, no one could reasonably and prudently have foreseen that they would. And these two things being made out, will abundantly evidence, that the foretelling of these things doth argue prophetick spirit in our SAVIOUR; and consequently his

his divine authority. Things that have necessary causes, if those causes be evident, any one may foretel that they will be : things that are probable, and likely to happen, every prudent man may reasonably conjecture that they will be, and consequently may in many cases successfully foretel them without a spirit of prophecy : but such things as in respect of us are purely contingent, and depend upon no necessary causes we know of, especially if they be withal unlikely to come to pass, no man can foretel but by the inspiration of that spirit, whose infinite wisdom knows all things ; and this is the true reason why the foretelling of future contingents hath always been looked upon as an argument of inspiration.

First, these things which our SAVIOUR foretold, were purely contingent ; that is, there was no necessity in human reason that they should come to pass ; and consequently no man without inspiration could certainly foretel them. Those things are said to be contingent in respect of us, which have no necessary cause that we know of ; particularly those things which depend upon the will of free agents, either the will of men, or of GOD. And such were those things which our SAVIOUR foretold ; many of them depended upon the will of men, whether they should happen or not, supposing the permissive will of GOD ; that is, that GOD had determined not to interpose and hinder them.

The death of CHRIST, with all the wicked and opprobrious circumstances of it, depended upon the will of men ; and therefore it was a thing that no man could foresee whether it would be or not. So likewise the resistance and opposition that was made to the gospel by the persecutions of men, and the malice of false prophets, did depend upon the wills of men.

But many of these events depended purely upon the will of GOD, which no man could foreknow, unless he did reveal it to him ; and if he did, this was an argument of inspiration, which is the thing we are contending for. Of this kind were the resurrection of our SAVIOUR from the dead ; his being taken up into heaven ; the miraculous powers and gifts wherewith the apostles

and primitive Christians were endowed ; the fatal destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, contrary to the design of those who brought it to pass ; the prevalency of the gospel in the world, in despite of all opposition made against it. All these were brought to pass in a more immediate manner by the power of God, and therefore depended purely upon his will.

Secondly, most of the things which our SAVIOUR foretold, were not only purely contingent in respect of us, and therefore could not without inspiration be certainly foreseen ; but were also exceeding unlikely, and improbable in themselves, and therefore could not so much as prudently have been conjectured. And to make this out more fully, I shall run over the several instances of our SAVIOUR's predictions, and shew how unlikely the things which he foretold, were to have come to pass ; and if this appear, it must be granted that our SAVIOUR was a prophet.

I. Our SAVIOUR's prediction concerning his own death and sufferings was a thing very unlikely to have come to pass. It was very likely that the pharisees and chief priests whose interest was so much struck at, should have malice enough against him, to design his ruin ; but that ever they should have accomplished it without a popular tumult and sedition, was very unlikely, considering the esteem and favour he had among the people. Who could have believed that the Jews, who had seen so many of his miracles, and received so great benefits by them, who were such admirers of his doctrine, and so astonished at it, who *would have made him king*, should ever have consented to have put him to death ? who could have thought that so soon after they had so unanimously brought him to Jerusalem in triumph with such hosanna's and acclamations, the same people should have been so eager to have him crucified ? I know there is nothing more inconstant, than the giddy and fickle multitude ; nothing less to be relied upon than the opinion and applause of the people : but because the humour of the people is so uncertain, therefore for this reason it was hard to prophesy what they would

would do. And nothing was more improbable, than that any should certainly foretel where this humour would at last fix and settle. Nay, it was very unlikely that they who had been raised to so great and just an esteem of him, from a clear conviction of his innocency and holiness, and of the divine power which attended him, should have had either the wickedness, or the confidence to have gone about to compass the death of so innocent and divine a person.

And it is very remarkable, that this was a thing so incredible to the disciples, that though our SAVIOUR did several times, in the plainest words that could be, tell them of his death and sufferings, yet they could not *understand* it, that is, it could by no means sink into them, they could not apprehend that ever any such thing should come to pass, *Mark ix. 31, 32. For he taught his disciples and said unto them, the Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and after that he is killed he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.* And *Luke ix. 43, 44, 45.* after our SAVIOUR had done a great miracle, it is said, *they were all amazed at the mighty power of God: but while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not; and they feared to ask him of that saying.* They looked upon it as a thing incredible, that he who did such works, and was attended with such a divine power, should ever be *delivered into the hands of men*; if men should be so malicious as to design his death, yet it was not credible that GOD should give up such a person into their hands. And again a little before his sufferings, he inculcates this more particularly upon them, *Luke xviii. 31, 32, 33, 34. Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be*

mocked,

mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit upon; and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and then it is said of the disciples, that they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. What was the matter? could any thing have been said in plainer words, than our SAVIOUR's declaring this to them (no certainly, they understood very well the meaning of those words; for it is said, *Matth. xvii. 23.* that when he said this to them, they were exceeding sorry, they were very much troubled to hear him say this; they understood very well what the words signified, and they were troubled at the first appearance and literal sense of them: but it seems they took them to be a parable, and so have some allegorical meaning hidden under them; for they could not imagine, that ever they should be literally true. And that this was their apprehension, seems to be sufficiently intimated by both the evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke, who after they had told us, that the disciples understood not this saying, they immediately add, that they feared to ask CHRIST of this saying; that is, they did not understand whether they were to take this saying in the literal and obvious sense of it; or to look upon it as an allegory, or a parable that had some hidden sense; but being troubled at the saying, because the obvious and literal sense had a great deal of horror, they were afraid to ask our SAVIOUR the meaning of it as they used always to ask him the meaning of his parables) for fear he should tell them, that he intended it literally. Now from this it appears, how unlikely it seemed to the disciples, that our SAVIOUR should suffer such things as he foretold of himself.

2. Our SAVIOUR's predictions concerning his rising again out of the grave the third day; concerning his being taken up into heaven; concerning the descent of the HOLY GHOST upon the apostles, in such miraculous powers and gifts after his ascension, were all things very unlikely and incredible, because so exceeding strange, and above the common course of nature. We look upon it as a wonderful thing, for a man certainly to fore-
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tel an ordinary thing : but if any man should tell us that after he was dead, and had lain three days in the grave, he should rise again, and be visibly taken up into heaven, and from thence bestow miraculous gifts upon men, and this should accordingly come to pass ; it were impossible not to think this man a prophet.

3. Our SAVIOUR's prediction concerning the fatal destruction of Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation, was very unlikely. But this I spake to at large, when I explained the prophecy.

4. The fate which our SAVIOUR foretold the gospel should have in the world, was a thing very improbable. That it should meet with great opposition and persecution was not strange ; nothing being more likely than that a religion which was new to the world, so contrary to the principles of those who had been educated in another religion, and so opposite to the interests of men should be opposed and resisted to the utmost : but there are these *three* things very strange, which our SAVIOUR foretold should attend the publication of the gospel.

(1.) That an action of no greater consideration than that was, of Mary's anointing of our LORD's head, and done privately, should be celebrated through the world in all ages : and the memory of it should be as far, and as long propagated, as the most famous actions of the greatest prince that ever was in the world.

(2.) This was strange and unlikely, which our SAVIOUR likewise foretold that false christs, and false prophets and teachers should arise after his death ; and after the Jews had been so severe to our SAVIOUR, for giving out himself to be the MESSIAS, though he gave such convincing evidence of it, this should not deter counterfeiters from assuming so dangerous a person, and that when christianity was persecuted, there should arise false apostles, and false teachers, that should pretend to christianity, when it was so odious a profession ; that any should be found that should dissemble in a manner so full of hazard and danger ; this was very strange and unlikely.

But because this prediction of our SAVIOUR's concerning false christs and false prophets, is asperst by the atheists, and particularly by Vaninus, as one of the most cunning and crafty actions that our SAVIOUR did ; as if after he had let himself into a reputation and esteem in the world, he had designed by this prediction to bolt the door against all others ; therefore it will be requisite that I speak a little more particularly to this.

1. It is acknowledged by the atheists themselves, particularly by Vaninus, that it does not appear that our SAVIOUR carried on any worldly design. Why then should he be suspected of it in this matter, which is capable of a good interpretation ; when his whole life, and all the actions of it, do clear him of any such suspicion ? but because it is said, that though he carried on no design for riches and power, yet he had a deep design to gain reputation and fame to himself in after ages ; therefore I shall add one or two considerations more, to shew how unreasonable, and how perfectly malicious this jealousy is.

2. Let us consider then, that this prediction of his would either be accomplished or not : but whether it was, or was not, it can be no argument of any design of vain glory. If it had not come to pass (as I have shewn it was very unlikely it should, especially within the compass of the time which he had prefixt for it) then he had been a false prophet, and so he had lost his reputation, by the very means whereby he intended to have established it, which I do not understand the craft and cunning of : for either he knew certainly that it would come to pass, or not ; if he did, he was a true prophet ; if he did not, he did not do politickly, in putting his reputation upon such a hazard.

3. If we suppose him, as this objection does, to have been an impostor, and consequently not to have believed in his own doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and another life after this ; what an apparent madness had it been to neglect the present advantages of this world, which he was capable of enjoying ; and to lay out for a name and reputation, after he was dead and extinguished,

and consequently when he should not be capable of having any sense and enjoyment of it !

And the instance of the Romans, who ventured their lives out of vain-glory, to get a name after they were dead, will avail nothing in this case ; because it plainly appears from all the heathen writers, that they did this upon a presumption of their immortality, and a persuasion that they should live in another world, and enjoy the pleasure of the fame by which their names should be celebrated in this world : but had they not been persuaded of this, it would have been the greatest folly in the world, to have ventured their lives to gain a fame after death, and to be spoken of with honour when they were not, and consequently could take no pleasure in it. This may suffice to be said in short, to this malicious and absurd objection. But,

(3.) This was strange and unlikely, that the gospel should have such success in the world. And the more likely it was, that it should meet with so much opposition and resistance, the more unlikely was it that it should prevail, especially by such means, and in such manner as it did ; that a few unlearned men, destitute of secular arts and learning, opposed by all the wit and power that the world could exert, should be able in the space of a few years to propagate and plant all over the known world a doctrine so despised and persecuted, so contrary to the almost invincible prejudice of education in another religion, so opposite to those two great governors of the world, the lusts and the interests of men ; nothing could have been foretold so unlikely and improbable as this is ; especially if we take in this, that the chief instrument of spreading this doctrine in the world, was the fiercest opposer and persecutor of it, I mean St. Paul, who by a light and voice from heaven, was taken off from persecuting christianity, and became the most active and zealous instrument of its propagation. The wonderful success and prevalency of the gospel by such means, and in such circumstances of difficulty, and potent opposition made against it, are a plain indication, that this doctrine was

assisted

assisted and countenanced from heaven ; that *it was of* GOD, and therefore *could not be overthrown*. Nothing but the mighty force of truth could, naked and unarmed, have done such wonders in the world.

And thus I have, I hope, fully shewn that those who lived in the age of our SAVIOUR, were capable of having sufficient assurance, that JESUS CHRIST, who declared the christian religion to the world, was sent of GOD. From the prophecies concerning him ; the testimonies that were given him by an immediate voice from heaven ; the miracles that were wrought by him, and on his behalf ; and by the prophetick spirit that gave evidence of his inspiration. And if any one doubt whether he gave these testimonies of his divine authority to the world, let him consider that it is almost as great a miracle as any of those, that a doctrine preached by one that gave no testimony of his divine authority to the world, should be so strangely propagated, and maintain its possession so long in the world ; I say, let him consider this, and methinks this should convince him of the truth of christianity.

S E R M O N CCXLII.

The evidences of the truth of the christian religion.

2 COR. iv. 3, 4.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the GOD of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them.

The ninth sermon on this text.

IN discoursing of the evidence of our SAVIOUR'S divine authority, I propos'd the considering *three things*.

First, what evidence they had, who heard the doctrine of the gospel immediately from our SAVIOUR.

Secondly, what evidence they had, who received this doctrine by the preaching of the apostles.

Thirdly, what evidence after-ages have, until the present time.

The *first* of these I have handled at large; and now proceed to the

Second, viz. to consider what assurance those who heard the doctrine of CHRIST from the apostles were capable of having concerning his divine authority; and of this I shall give you an account in these *three* particulars.

First, they had all the assurance concerning this matter, which men can have of any thing from the testimony of credible eye and ear-witnesses.

Secondly

Secondly, they had this testimony confirmed by miracles.

Thirdly, they had yet a farther evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, from the wonderful prevalency and success of it, by such improbable and unlikely means.

First, those who received the doctrine of CHRIST from the apostles, had all the assurance of CHRIST'S divine authority, that men can have of any thing from the testimony of credible eye and ear-witnesses. The apostles who immediately conversed with our SAVIOUR, and heard his doctrine, and saw his miracles, they had the testimony of their own senses for his divine authority; they heard and saw the attestations which GOD gave to him: and those to whom the apostles preached, received all this from them, as from eye and ear-witnesses. So that those who received the doctrine of CHRIST from the apostles, had all the arguments which the apostles had, to satisfy them concerning CHRIST'S divine authority, only they were not conveyed to them in so immediate a manner. The apostles saw and heard those things themselves, which gave them satisfaction that JESUS CHRIST came from GOD: those to whom the apostles preached, received these things from their testimony.

And this also was a sufficient ground of assurance, as will clearly appear, if we can make out these two things.

I. That the apostles were credible witnesses. And,

II. That if they were so, then their testimony was sufficient to persuade belief.

I. That the apostles were credible witnesses. Of their knowledge there can be no question, because they gave testimony only of what themselves had seen and heard; so that if they falsified in any thing, it could not be for want of sufficient knowledge, but for want of fidelity. Now those who heard them, had all the arguments that could be to satisfy them of their fidelity. They delivered things plainly, and without artificial insinuations; they all agreed in their testimony; and were always constant to themselves in the same relation; there was no visible interest to sway them in the least to

falsify against their knowledge ; they gained nothing by it ; nay, so far were they from that, that they run themselves hereby upon the greatest hazards and disadvantages ; and which is the highest evidence that this world can give of any man's sincerity, they ventured their lives for this testimony, and sealed it with their blood. For though martyrdom be no sufficient argument of the truth of that for which a man lays down his life, yet it is a very good argument of a man's sincerity ; it signifies that a man is in earnest, and believes himself ; and if the thing be not true, yet that he thinks it to be so, otherwise he would not have died for it : so that if we have no reason to doubt of the knowledge of those witnesses (as certainly we have no reason, the things which they testified being plain matters, what they saw and heard, in which every man knows whether he speaks true or not ; I say, if we have no reason to doubt of their knowledge,) we cannot question their integrity and sincerity, having the highest evidence of that, which this world can afford : for there cannot be a better argument of the integrity of witnesses, than to lay down their lives for their testimony.

II. If the apostles were credible witnesses, then was their testimony sufficient to persuade belief. For what greater evidence can any man have of any thing which himself has not seen, than to receive it from credible eye-witnesses, that is, from such persons as we have all the reason in the world to judge worthy of credit. This evidence men are contented to accept in other cases, as sufficient to induce belief : and if we will not accept it in matters of religion, we are very partial and unjust. We find that upon the evidence of credible witnesses men generally proceed with good assurance in human affairs ; the chief temporal interests of men, of their estates, and reputation, and lives are determined upon no better evidence than this. Now if in matters of religion we will reject the evidence which shall be sufficient to sway our assent in other things, it is a plain sign that we have less mind to religion than to other things :

things ; that we have some interest or pique against it ; otherwise we would not refuse to yield an equal assent, where the evidence is equal.

This reason tells us ; and our SAVIOUR in effect says the same thing, when he charged those who rejected this evidence of credible witnesses with the sin of unbelief. *Mark xvi. 14. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.* But now if the testimony of credible witnesses be not a sufficient ground of faith, it could have been no sin in the disciples, not to believe those who had seen CHRIST risen from the dead.

Secondly, those who received the doctrine of CHRIST from the apostles, had not only the testimony of credible witnesses, but they had this testimony confirmed by miracles. Because the apostles were to go abroad into the world, and to preach to many who never saw nor knew them before, and consequently had no reason at first to believe their testimony, till they were satisfied of the value of the witnesses ; and this would require long time, and frequent conversation, so that the gospel must have made but a very slow progress at this rate ; and because they were like to meet with great opposition from the powers and wits of the world, from the prejudices of education, and from the lusts and interests of men ; therefore for the speedier and more effectual propagation of the gospel, God was pleased to confirm this testimony by miracles, to endue those who were to preach the gospel to the world, with miraculous powers and gifts, of speaking all languages, and healing diseases, and casting out devils, of foretelling things to come, and raising the dead, that being accompanied with these visible and sensible signs of the divine presence and power, their testimony might more easily be believed.

And that this was the end of those miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, the scripture frequently tells us. Hence it is that our SAVIOUR forbade them to preach the gospel abroad, till they were furnished with this power,

power, *Luke xxiv. 49. But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be indued with power from on high. And Acts i. 8, 9. our SAVIOUR tells the apostles before his ascension, But ye shall receive power after that the HOLY GHOST is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the utmost parts of the earth.* This was that which qualified them to be witnesses to CHRIST, and which gave confirmation to their testimony. So St. Mark tells us, *Mark xvi. 20. And they went forth and preached every where, the LORD working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* To the same purpose the apostle to the Hebrews, ch. ii. 3, 4. speaking of the publishing of the gospel, *How shall we escape, says he, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the LORD, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?* what was the confirmation that was given to it? it follows in the next words, *GOD also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the HOLY GHOST.* The apostles bare witness of CHRIST, and GOD bare witness to them, by those miraculous powers and gifts, that their testimony was true.

Thirdly, those who received the doctrine of CHRIST from the apostles had yet a farther evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, from the wonderful success and prevalency of it by such improbable and unlikely means. Had the doctrine of CHRIST's religion been suited to the corruptions of men, and stolen insensibly into the world, and prevailed by degrees in the revolution of many ages, as the heathen superstition and idolatry did, which met with no opposition from the lusts and interests of men, it had then been no strange thing: or had it been planted by power and force of arms, as the religion of Mahomet was, then indeed the success of it had been no argument that it was from GOD. Had it been set off with all imaginable advantages of wit and eloquence, as the philosophy of the heathens was, and had it been entertained by a few more sublime spirits, and those who were more studious and contemplative, and whose understanding

were

42. were elevated above the common pitch, this might have been lookt upon but as human and ordinary, and according to the common and usual course of things. But that a doctrine which was so opposite to the lusts and inclinations of men, which was persecuted and opposed by all the powers of the world, despised and condemned by the witty part of mankind ; that a doctrine, the profession whereof did expose men to so many worldly inconveniencies, to so many dangers and sufferings, to derision and to death, should be planted by a few mean and inconsiderable men, destitute of all secular power, and advantages of human learning and eloquence ; and in so short a time be so vastly propagated, and so generally entertained by all sorts of men, rich and poor, philosophers and illiterate ; this was extraordinary, and can be attributed to nothing else but a divine power accompanying it, and bearing it up against the power and malice of men. That the doctrine of the gospel delivered to the world by mean persons, with so much simplicity and plainness, should so strangely affect the hearts of men, and be of so admirable a force to stir up and inflame men to piety and virtue, seems to me a very plain argument of its divinity : for we do not find that any doctrine that was merely human, had ever any considerable power upon the minds of men, where it was not set off with the arts of speech and charms of eloquence : and then it only produceth some present motions and heats ; but seldom hath any lasting and permanent effect, such as the christian religion hath had in the world.

Thus I have shewn what assurance those who received the doctrine of the gospel from the apostles, were capable of having, concerning the divinity of this doctrine, and the divine authority of the persons who declared it to the world.

Thirdly, I am to consider what assurance after-ages, down to this day, are capable of having concerning this matter : and this principally concerns us, who live at the distance of so many ages from the first revelation of the gospel. Of this I shall give you an account in these two particulars.

First,

First, we have an authentick and credible account of this doctrine, and of the confirmation which was in the first ages given to it, transmitted down to us.

Secondly, the effects of this doctrine still remain in the world.

First, we have a credible and authentick account of this doctrine, and of the confirmation which in the first ages was given to it, transmitted down to us. I told you at first, that there are but these *three* ways whereby we can be assured of matters of fact.

1. By the immediate testimony of our own senses, in which we are present when the thing is done or spoken, and see and hear it. Or,

2. By the testimony of credible eye or ear-witnesses of it. Or,

3. By a credible account or relation of it transmitted to us. And all these ways, in their kind, are accounted sufficient to give men an undoubted assurance of matters of fact. No man doubts of what he himself sees or hears : men generally believe many things which they have not opportunity of seeing themselves, and which they be attested to them by credible eye-witnesses : and for things that were done long ago, and which no man now alive was witness of, men are abundantly satisfied by a credible relation transmitted down to them. Upon this account men do firmly believe that Alexander about two thousand years ago conquered a great part of the world ; and that there was such a person as Julius Caesar, who seventeen hundred years ago conquered England ; and the like. Now if we have the doctrine and history of the gospel, and all the evidences of our SAVIOUR's divine authority, conveyed down to us, in as credible a manner as any of these ancient matters of fact are, which mankind do most firmly believe, then we have sufficient ground to be assured of it.

Now there are but *two* ways imaginable, whereby the doctrine of CHRIST's religion, and the evidences of its divinity can be conveyed down to us, either by oral report and tradition ; or by books and writing. The former of these the experience of the world hath shew

to be very uncertain, and in the succession of many ages liable to great changes and hazards. Hence it is that the prudence of mankind and the necessity of human affairs, have introduced the latter way of conveying the memory of things to after-ages, namely by writing and records : and the good God likewise in his wise providence hath taken care, that those who were eye and ear-witnesses of our SAVIOUR's doctrine and life, should commit to writing the history and relation of those matters, that so the memory of them might be preserved to all generations : and these books which we call *the holy scriptures*, are the authentick records of our religion, without which christian religion in probability had long since either been strangely corrupted, or wholly lost out of the world. For that oral report would not have preserved it, there is this evidence, sufficient to convince any man that is not obstinately resolved to the contrary, that of all the persons that formerly lived in the world, and the great actions that have been done, besides what are recorded in history, and of the innumerable miracles of our SAVIOUR, which were not written in the books of the gospel, I say of all these, oral tradition hath preserved nothing ; so that if the doctrine of the christian religion, and the history of the life and actions of our SAVIOUR and the apostles, had not been put into a surer way of conveyance than that of oral tradition, in all probability before this time there would have been left no certain monuments of them in the world.

And that we may understand how much these latter ages are indebted to the wisdom and goodness of God, that he hath furnished us with so fixt and certain a way of being acquainted with his will, with the doctrine and grounds of our religion, I might represent to you what advantages this standing revelation of the scripture hath above that way of oral tradition, yea though the revelation of the gospel had been renewed every two or three ages. But this has been done in some former discourses *. I therefore proceed to the other ground

* See Vol. I. Sermon 73. and 74.

of assurance which the ages after the apostles are capable of having, viz.

Secondly, the effect of this doctrine still remains in the world. Christian religion is still profest in several nations, and is entertained by a considerable part of the world: and allowing for the difference between the extraordinary assistance which at first accompanied the gospel, and was necessary for the planting of it, and the more human and ordinary ways whereby it is now propagated, it hath considerable effects upon the hearts and lives of men.

It might justly indeed be expected, considering the reasonableness of christian religion, and the great evidence we have of the truth and divinity of it, that it should have a greater force and power upon men, than it hath in most parts of Christendom; but we cannot reasonably expect in a prosperous state of christianity, those extraordinary heats and fervours which the primitive Christians had whilst they were under continual persecution: we cannot reasonably expect that unity among Christians, and that they should be so generally and universally good, as they were under a state of persecution; for common sufferings have a strange force to unite men, and to endear them to one another: in times of persecution it might be expected that all or most of those who profess themselves Christians, should be really so: when a profession is dangerous to those that make it, and attended with persecutions, then there will be but few pretenders to it, scarce any man will dissemble to the hazard of his life: but when any religion flourisheth and is prosperous, when it is an odious thing, and against a man's interest not to profess it, then it may justly be feared that there will be great numbers of hypocrites, of those who in compliance with the fashion, and the prevailing interest, will take upon them the outward profession of it.

But however we see the same effects of christianity still remain in the world: CHRIST is still owned as the true MESSIAS and *the Son of God*; his doctrine acknowledged to be true, and to have been from God; the

that thus far his promise hath been made good of *building his church upon a rock*, and that *the gates of hell should not prevail against it*. That christianity hath uninterruptedly continued for above sixteen hundred years, is an additional evidence of the divinity of this doctrine, which the first ages of the world could not have : only this is sadly to be bewailed, that this religion, which hath all imaginable confirmation given to the truth of it, should have no greater effect upon the lives of men ; that when we have so much reason to assent to it, yet so few can be persuaded to practise it ; that when we make so many solemn professions of our belief of the truth of it ; yet by the actions of our lives we should so visibly contradict the articles of our belief.

Thus I have gone through the *first* thing I proposed to be considered in my text, viz. The full and clear evidence which we have of the truth of the gospel, and particularly of the divine authority of that person, who declared the christian religion to the world. There are *two* other general heads which the text would lead us to consider, which I shall but briefly treat of, and so conclude this subject.

The *second* thing considerable in the words is, the cause of the infidelity of men, notwithstanding all the evidence which the gospel carries along with it ; which the apostle expresseth in these words, *But if our gospel be bid, it is bid to them that are lost ; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them.*

In speaking to this, I shall do these *four* things.

First, Shew why the infidelity of men is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it.

Secondly, Shew more particularly what influence the devil hath upon the minds of men to keep them in unbelief.

Thirdly, that this does not excuse the infidelity of men.

Fourthly, shew the wickedness and unreasonableness of infidelity.

First, why the infidelity of men is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it. There are *two* principles that bear sway in the world, and have a more immediate influence upon the mind of man ; the holy spirit of **GOD**, and the devil : the former of these is continually moving and enclining them to good ; the latter swaying and tempting them to evil ; and these *two* principles share mankind between them. Hence it is that in scripture, the spirit of **GOD** is said to dwell in good men ; and the wicked and vicious part of mankind (whom the scripture frequently calls the world) are said to be in the possession of the devil, and to belong to his share and lot. Upon this account the devil is called in the text *the god of this world*. Accordingly St. John frequently rangeth mankind under these *two* heads ; those that belong to **GOD**, and those that belong to the devil, **1 John iii. 9.** *He that committeth sin is of the devil ; but he that committeth not sin, is born of GOD.* In the next verse he calleth them the children of **GOD**, and the children of the devil : in this the children of **GOD** are manifest, and the children of the devil. So likewise chap. v. 19. *And we know that we are of GOD, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.* Or as the words may be rendered more suitably to the opposition which the apostle aims at, *the whole world is subject to the wicked one ; we are of GOD, but the rest of the world is subject to the devil.*

Upon this account it is, that in the constant phrase of scripture, all good motions and inclinations, and all good graces and virtues are ascribed to the spirit of **GOD**, as the author and worker of them ; and all wicked and vicious inclinations, all the sins and vices of men are attributed to the devil, as in some sort the author and worker of them : and because faith is the root of all other graces and virtues, as infidelity is of sin and wickedness, therefore faith is in a peculiar manner said to be the work of the **HOLY GHOST** : and infidelity the work of the devil. And as the spirit of **GOD** is said to enlighten the understandings of men, and to open their hearts that they may believe ; so the devil is said to blind

the minds of them that believe not. As the spirit of God is said to work in them that believe : so the devil is said to work in the children of unbelief. *Eph. ii. 2.* He is called the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience, *antichrist, of unbelief.* This is one of the principal designs which the devil hath always carried on in the world, to bring men to unbelief, and to keep them in it. As it is the great work of the spirit of truth to lead men into truth, and bring them to the belief of it : so the great business of the devil is to seduce men from the truth. Upon this account he is said, *John viii. 44.* to be a murderer from the beginning, because he abode not in the truth ; which refers to the first temptation, whereby he ruined and destroyed our first parents, by seducing them to unbelief ; *Hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ?* and because he found this attempt so successful, he still pursues mankind with the same temptation of unbelief. This for the first ; why infidelity is attributed to the devil, as the cause of it.

I come in the second place to shew more particularly what influence the devil hath upon the minds of men, to keep them in unbelief ; how and in what manner he blinds the minds of them that believe not. These two ways chiefly ; by false principles ; and by vicious and corrupt habits.

I. By false principles, which when they have once got possession of the understanding, like so many enemies they defend it, and hold out against the truth. By this means the devil kept a great part of the Jews and of the heathen world in unbelief ; and their minds were so blinded by these false principles which they had entertained, that they could not see the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST. As for the Jews, he had with a great deal of art conveyed false principles into them, whereby they were extremely prejudiced against CHRIST and his doctrine ; so that when he, who was the desire of all nations, and whom the Jews had looked for, with so longing an expectation, was come, they could see no beauty in him, wherefore he should be desired. The

devil no doubt understood very well by the prophecies of the old testament, that the MESSIAS was to come, who would give a terrible blow to his kingdom ; and therefore to provide against this storm which he saw coming upon him, he possess the Jews a great while before with false apprehensions of the MESSIAS, that he was to be a great temporal prince, and to deliver Israel from all their enemies, and to subdue all nations to them ; and he plaid his game so well, that the most learned among the Jews were generally possess with this apprehension, under the notion of a divine doctrine, which had been brought down to them by tradition from Moses and the prophets : so that when the MESSIAS came, and they saw nothing of the outward glory and splendor which they expected, they would not know him, but despised and rejected him, as a counterfeit and impostor.

As for the idolatrous Gentiles, he had for many ages together blinded them with false notions of God and his worship, and with principles of a false philosophy, by which when they came to measure the doctrine of CHRIST, the plain truths of christian religion seemed foolish and ridiculous to them ; and by these prejudices the devil kept many of them, especially of the philosophers, from believing the gospel.

And proportionably in every age, suitably to the temper of it, he endeavours to possess men with false principles, either to keep them in unbelief, or to drive them to it.

II. The *second* way whereby the devil *blinds the minds of them that believe not*, is by vicious and corrupt habits ; which though they do not possess the understanding, yet they have a bad influence upon it : as fumes and vapours from the lower parts of the body affect the head. The vices and lusts of men darken the understanding, and fill the mind with gross and sensual apprehensions of things, and render men unfit to discern those truths that are of a spiritual nature and tendency, and indisposed to receive them. When mens *deeds are evil, they do not love the light*, lest it should *reprove their vices, and make them manifest*.

manifest. Truth is offensive and grievous to a corrupt mind, as the light of the sun is to sore eyes. A vicious man is not free to entertain those truths which would check and cross him in his way ; he looks upon them as enemies, and therefore thinks himself concerned to oppose them. Every lust makes a man partial in his judgment, and lays a false bias upon his understanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it lean towards that side of the question which is most agreeable to the interest of his lusts.

And by this means the devil kept many, both of the Jews and Gentiles, in unbelief ; he had tempted them to those sins which did indispose them for the receiving of that doctrine which enjoins *the denying of ungodliness, and worldly lusts*, and chargeth men so strictly with all manner of holiness and purity. The pharisees under a mask of religion were guilty of great wickedness and impiety : and the heathen were monstrously degenerated into all manner of vice. So that it was not only the false principles, but likewise the vicious lives of men, which were opposite to the doctrine of the gospel, and *blinded their minds, that the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST did not shine into them.*

And the devil still makes use of this means to bring men to infidelity, and keep them in it ; as knowing that the shortest way to atheism and infidelity, is to debauch them in their lives. Therefore the apostle seems to give this as the reason of the infidelity of some in his time, *2 Tbeff. ii. 12. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* When men once take pleasure in wickedness, then infidelity becomes their interest ; for they cannot otherwise defend and excuse a wicked life, but in denying the truth which opposeth it : that man only stands fair for the entertaining of truth, who is under the power of no lust, because he hath nothing to seduce him, and draw him aside in his enquiry after truth ; he hath no interest but to find truth : he hath the indifference of a traveller, who is not inclined to one way more than another, but is only concerned to know the right way.

Such indifferency of mind every good man hath ; he is ready to receive truth, when sufficient evidence is offered to him, because he is not concerned that the contrary proposition should be true : if a man be addicted to any lust, he is not likely to judge impartially of things : and therefore our SAVOUR does with great reason require this disposition to qualify a man for the discerning of truth, *John vii. 17. If any man will do GOD's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself.* He that is desirous to do the will of GOD, he is like to judge indifferently concerning any doctrine that pretends to be from GOD ; for if there be not good evidence for it, he hath no reason to deceive himself, by entertaining that as from GOD, which he hath no assurance that it is so ; and if there be good evidence for it, he hath no interest to reject it : but if a man be enslaved to any vice or lust, he is not free to judge of those matters which touch upon his interest ; but is under a great temptation to infidelity, because he must needs be unwilling to acknowledge the truth of that doctrine which lies so cross to his interest.

Thirdly, this does not excuse the infidelity of men, that the devil is in some sort the cause of it ; because he cannot blind our minds, unless we consent to it : he can only suggest false principles to us, but we may chuse whether we will entertain them ; he can only tempt us to be wicked, he cannot force us to be so whether we will or not ; as we may resist the dictates, and quench the blessed motions and suggestions of GOD's spirit, and too often do : so may we *resist the devil*, and repel or *quench* those *fiery darts* which he casts into our minds, though we do not do it so often as we should. We cannot resist the motions of GOD's spirit without injury to our selves : but we may safely oppose the suggestions of the devil ; and we may do it with success : if we sincerely endeavour it. So GOD hath promised, that if *we resist the devil, he shall flee from us* : but if we voluntarily consent to his temptations, and suffer our selves to be blinded by him, the fault is our own, as well as his,

his, and we are guilty of that infidelity which we suffer him to tempt us into. And this will appear, if we consider,

Fourthly, the wickedness and unreasonableness of infidelity. The scripture every where gives it a bad character, calling it, *an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God*. Not to believe those revelations of God, which are sufficiently propounded to us, is *an apostacy from the living God*, a kind of atheism, and an argument of a very evil temper and disposition. And therefore St. John speaks of infidelity, as the highest affront to God imaginable, and as it were a giving God the lye, *1 John v. 10. He that believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son, is said to make God a liar.*

The greatest and clearest testimonies that ever God gave to any person in the world, were to **JESUS CHRIST**, and yet how full of infidelity were the Jews, to whom those testimonies were given? they are the great patterns of infidelity, who resisted such immediate evidence; and by the characters which the new testament gives us of them, we may judge of the evil and unreasonableness of infidelity: and if we consult the history of the new testament, we shall find infidelity described by such characters and properties, and accompanied with such qualities, as shew it to be a very evil and unreasonable spirit. The principal of them are these:

1. Monstrous partiality, in denying that which had greater evidence than other matters which they did believe.
2. Unreasonable and groundless prejudice.
3. A childish kind of perverseness.
4. Obstinacy and pertinacious persisting in error.
5. Want of patience to consider and examine what can be said for the truth.
6. Rudeness, and boisterous falling into uncivil terms.
7. Fury and outrageous passion.

8. Infi-

8. Infidelity is usually attended with bloody and inhuman persecution. But the treating on these particulars I reserve for another subject *.

The *third* and *last* thing contained in the text, is the dangerous state of those who having the gospel propounded to them, yet do not entertain and believe it; the apostle tells us they are in a lost and perishing condition; *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*

I say of those who have the gospel propounded to them. As for those to whom the gospel was never offered, they shall not be condemned for their unbelief of it: God will not punish them for not believing the revelation which was never propounded to them, but for sinning against *the law written in their hearts*. So the apostle hath stated this matter, *Rom. ii. 12, 14, 15.* they that have a law revealed to them by God, shall be *judged by that law*; but they that are *without such a law*, shall be *judged without the law, by the law which is written in their hearts*. Those persons and nations in the world, to whom the gospel was not revealed, shall not be condemned for not believing it; but for sins committed by them against the light of nature, and the law which is written in every man's breast.

But those who have the gospel propounded to them, and yet continue in unbelief, their case is the most dangerous of any persons in the world, whether they be speculative or practical infidels.

1. For speculative infidels (of whom I have been principally speaking) we may guess how great their condemnation shall be, by the greatness of their sin, which I have endeavoured fully to describe to you, with all its aggravations. It is called, *Heb. iii. 12. An evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God, ἐν τῷ ἀπισθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ ζῶντος Θεοῦ*. Infidelity is a kind of *apostacy from God*; it is said to be the giving of God the lie, *1 John v. 10. He that believeth on the Son of*

* See the following sermons on John iii. 19. Ser. 3.

GOD, *bath the witness in himself: he that believeth not GOD, bath mad: him a liar*; and we cannot but think that GOD will severely punish those who put such affronts upon him: it is but equal, that they who resist the clearest light, should *have their portion in utter darkness.*

2. For the practical infidels, those who in words acknowledge the gospel to be true, but *in works deny it*; their condition is every whit as bad as the others; may I had almost said, that it shall be more tolerable at the day of judgment for the speculative infidel, than for them. He who denies the truth of the christian religion, and lives contrary to the precepts of it, he acts suitably to his principles; but he that owns the truth of the gospel, and lives a wicked life, offers violence to those principles which he hath entertained.

For if we profess our selves Christians, by this profession we declare to the world, that we believe that the Son of GOD hath declared that doctrine to the world, which we call *the gospel*, and hath promised to be *the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*, and hath threatned men with eternal misery in case of disobedience; and that we make not the least doubt, but that both in his promises and threatnings GOD will be as good as his word: but if in the midst of this profession, we live contrary to the holy precepts of the gospel, in *ungodliness and worldly lusts*, in profane swearing, by a trifling and irreverent use of the great and glorious name of GOD, in the neglect of GOD, and of the duties of religion, in the profanation of his day, in drunkenness and filthy lusts, in fraud and oppression, in lying and perjury, in wrath and malice, in enmity and uncharitableness one toward another; this very thing, that we have made profession of the gospel, will be an aggravation of our condemnation. Do we think, that at the day of judgment, we shall escape by pleading this for our selves, that we believed the gospel, and made profession of it? no! *out of our own mouths we shall be condemned*; for it seems *we knew our master's will, and yet did it not*; we were convinced that

that we ought not to do such things, and yet we did them ; we believed the glorious promises of the gospel, and yet we *neglected this great salvation*, as a thing not worthy the looking after ; we were verily persuaded of the intolerable and endless torments of hell, and yet we would leap into those flames.

Nothing can make more against us, than such an apology as this ; our very excuse will be the highest accusation and charge that can be brought against us, and out of our own confession we shall be condemned.

All that now remains, is to make some application of this discourse which I have made to you concerning the truth of the christian religion ; which I should do in these *two* particulars.

First, to persuade us to a firm belief of the christian religion. And,

Secondly, to live according to it. But as to this, I have prevented my self in some former discourses *.

* See serm. 170, and 174.

SERMON CCXLIII.

The excellency and universality of the christian revelation, with the sin and danger of rejecting it.

JOHN iii. 19.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The first sermon on this text.

AT the 16th verse of this chapter our SAVIOUR declares to Nicodemus (who was already convinced by his miracles, that he was *a teacher come from God*) the great love and goodness of God to mankind in sending him into the world, to be the Saviour of it, *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Considering the great wickedness of mankind, it might justly have been feared and expected, that God should have sent his Son into the world upon a different errand, to have punished the wickedness of men, and to have destroyed them from off the face of the earth; but he tells us at the 17th verse, *that God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved;* and that the only way to avoid this condemnation, and to obtain that salvation which God designed for us, is *to believe on him, whom God hath sent:* verse 18. *He that believeth on him, is not condemned: but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* He is

is condemned by this very act of rejecting the Son of God, because he rejects the only way whereby salvation is to be had : and to aggravate the condemnation of such persons, our SAVIOUR here in the text represents himself and his doctrine, as *a light come into the world*, on purpose to discover to us our sinful and miserable condition, and the way of our recovery out of it and salvation from it ; and those that believe not on him, who do not entertain and welcome this clear and gracious discovery of God's love and goodness to mankind, as doing the absurdest thing imaginable, and making the most preposterous choice, preferring *darkness* before light ; *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.*

In which words there are these *six* things observable.

First, the description which is here given of our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, they are called *a light*. *Light is come*, that is, the Son of God preaching the doctrine of life and salvation to men.

Secondly, the universal influence of this light, *light is come into the world*. It is designed for illumination and instruction, not only of a particular place and nation, but of a whole world.

Thirdly, the excellency and advantages of this doctrine above any other doctrine or institution, even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God ; they are all but *darkness* in comparison of it, *light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.*

Fourthly, the absurdity and unreasonableness of rejecting the doctrine of the gospel ; it is a preferring *darkness* before *light* ; *men loved darkness rather than light* ; that is, they chose rather to continue in their former ignorance, than to entertain this clear and most perfect discovery of God's will to mankind.

Fifthly, the true reason and account of this absurd choice, *men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

Sixthly, the great guilt of those who reject the doctrine of the gospel; by this very act of theirs *they are condemned*, nay they condemn themselves, because they reject the only means of their salvation; *this is the condemnation*, this very thing condemns and argues the height of their folly and guilt, that when light is come into the world, they preferred darkness before it. I shall discourse distinctly on these particulars.

First, we will consider the description which is here given of our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, they are called *light*; *light is come into the world*. Light is a metaphor frequently used in scripture for knowledge, especially for spiritual and divine knowledge; and those who teach and instruct others are said to be *lights*. So our SAVIOUR is frequently called *the light of the world*, and *the true light*; and his disciples, who were to instruct the world, are called *light*, *ye are the light of the world*; and the doctrine of our SAVIOUR is likewise called a *light*, *the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST*, 2 Cor. iv. 4. And it is with respect to his doctrine, that he is here said in the text to be *a light come into the world*; which phrase of *coming into the world*, does not so immediately refer to his nativity, as to his commission from God; for this phrase of *coming into the world*, is of the same importance with that of *being sent from God*; as verse 17. where he says of himself, that God *sent him into the world, to condemn the world*; and here in the text, *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world*; that is, that when God sent his Son on purpose to preach such a doctrine, men should reject it and set it at nought: and in this sense, this phrase of *coming into the world*, is I think frequently used in the new testament, for *coming in God's name, upon some message to the world*. So chap. vi. ver. 14. some of the Jews being convinced of our SAVIOUR's divine commission, they express it thus; *of a truth this is that prophet which was to come into the world*. So chap. xii. 46. speaking of himself as sent of God, says he, *I am come a light into the world*; he had said just before, *be that seeth me, seeth him that sent me*; and then he adds, *I am a light come*

into the world. There is one text indeed, where this phrase seems to be taken for being *born into the world*, chap. i. 9. *And that was the true light, which enlightens every man that cometh into the world* : but several of the fathers, as St. Cyril and St. Austin, read this text otherwise, and that with great probability, considering the use of this phrase every where else ; I say they read it thus ; *this was the true light which coming into the world, enlighteneth every man* ; that is, which was sent from God to enlighten all mankind : and so this phrase of *coming into the world*, refers not to mens being born into the world, but to our SAVIOUR's being sent from God ; and this our SAVIOUR seems to distinguish from his birth, *John xviii. 37. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness of the truth*, meaning that he was not only born but commissioned by God for this end.

But enough for the explication of this phrase, the proper importance whereof is not unworthy our knowledge, especially since a sect amongst us build their doctrine of a light within them, and born with them, sufficient to conduct every man to salvation, upon that text I mentioned before, *this was the true light, which enlightens every man that cometh into the world* ; for which there is no pretence, if we read it, as the original will very well bear it, *this was the true light, which coming into the world, enlighteneth every man*. And so our SAVIOUR says of himself, *chap. xii. 46. I who am the light, am come into the world*.

But that which I principally intended under this head is the unfolding of the metaphor, which runs through the text, that so we may come at the plain sense and meaning of it, namely, why our SAVIOUR, or (which is all one) the doctrine which he preached to the world is represented to us by *light*. And here I might tell you that the doctrine of the gospel is called a *light*, with regard to its chearing and reviving nature ; *light* (says Solomon) *is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to the eye to behold the sun* ; so the gospel is *glad tidings of great joy*. In regard likewise of its purity ; as *light*

is the purest of all corporeal beings, so the doctrine of the gospel doth enjoin a greater holiness and purity, than any other religion ever did. And (not to be tedious in light things) in regard of its sudden communication and speedy propagation in the world. As *light* darts it self from east to west in a moment ; so the gospel was propagated with incredible swiftness, and did in a very short space diffuse it self over the world. Thus I might tell you, that in these and many more such pretty respects, the doctrine of the gospel is called *a light* : but I do not love to hunt down a metaphor ; for I know very well, that the scripture (like other authors) useth a metaphor only to one purpose at one time ; and though many more similitudes may by fancy be found out, it is certain, but one is intended ; which I take notice of on purpose to reprove the vanity and injudiciousness of chasing metaphors farther than ever they were intended : for a metaphor is commonly used to represent to our minds the first and most obvious likeness of things. Thus the doctrine of the gospel is called *light*, in respect of the clearness of its discovery, it being one of the chief and most obvious properties of light, to discover and make visible it self, and other things. So the apostle tells us, *1. Cor. xiii. 12. But all things that are reprov'd, are made manifest by the light* : and in this respect, and no other, the doctrine of the gospel is here called *a light* ; because it clearly discovers to the world those things, which they were either wholly ignorant or uncertain of before ; and withal it carries its own evidence along with it, and hath plain characters of its own divinity upon it.

And here I might shew at large these *two* things.

First, what discoveries the doctrine of the gospel hath made to the world.

Secondly, what evidence it brings along with it of its own divinity, that it is from God.

First, what discoveries the doctrine of the gospel hath made to the world. It hath more clearly discovered,

1. The nature of God, which is the great foundation of religion.

2. Our own sinful and miserable state.

3. The way and means of our remedy and recovery out of it.

4. A more perfect and certain law and rule of life.

5. A more powerful assistance, for the aid and encouragement of our obedience.

6. And lastly, the gospel hath more clearly discovered to us the eternal rewards and punishments of another world, which are the great arguments to obedience and a holy life. I shall go over these as briefly as I can, having elsewhere * treated more largely on some of them.

1. In the doctrine of the gospel we have a clear discovery made to us of the nature of GOD ; which is the great foundation of all religion. For such as mens notions and conceptions of GOD are, such will their religious worship and services of him be ; either worthy of him, and becoming his great and glorious majesty ; or vain and superstitious, answerable to the idol of their their own imagination : and such will be the actions of their lives ; for all men make their GOD their example, and esteem it an essential piece of religion, to endeavour to be like him. Now the gospel gives us the most true and perfect character of the divine nature, most agreeable to reason, and the wisest and best apprehensions of mankind, such a character as is apt to beget in us the highest love and reverence towards him, and to engage us to the imitation of him by the constant practice of holiness and vertue, representing him to us as most amiable for his goodness, and most dreadful for his power and justice, describing him to be a pure spirit, which the heathen did not generally believe ; and consequently to be worshipped in such a manner, as is most suitable to his spiritual nature, concerning which the Jews were infinitely mistaken : for GOD did not command sacrifices to the Jews, and all those external and troublesome observances, because they were most agreeable to his own nature ; but because of the grossness of their apprehensions, and the carnality and hardness of their hearts.

* See his Grace's sermons published by himself, vol. 1. serm. 5.

God did not prescribe this way of worship to them, because it was best ; but because the temper of that people, which was so very prone to idolatry, would admit of no other.

The gospel likewise discovers to us more clearly the goodness of God, and his great love to mankind, one of the best and strongest motives in the world to the love of God. The heathen did generally dread God, and look upon him as fierce and revengeful, and therefore they studied by all means to appease him, even by human sacrifices, and offering up their own children to him ; and all along in the old testament, though there be plain and express declarations of the goodness of God, yet he is generally described as very terrible and severe : but the gospel is full of gracious declarations of God's love and mercy to mankind. In the old testament he is usually stiled *the LORD of hosts, the great and terrible God* : but in the new testament, he represents himself in a milder stile, *the GOD of love and peace, the father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, and in him the father of mercies, and the GOD of all patience and consolation.* And this difference between the stile of the old and new testament was so remarkable, that one of the greatest sects in the primitive church (I mean that of the Gnosticks, which was subdivided into many other sects) did upon this found their heresy of two principles or gods : the one evil and fierce and cruel, whom they called the god of the old testament ; the other kind and loving and merciful, whom they called the god of the new.

2. The gospel hath likewise more clearly discovered to us our own sinful and wretched state ; that being made upright, and originally designed by God to live in a holy and happy condition, and endued with sufficient power for that purpose, we by our wilful transgression and disobedience of an easy law given to our first parents, are sunk into a wretched state of ignorance and weakness, of sin and sorrow, and thereby are become estranged from God, and obnoxious to his wrath and displeasure, and utterly unable to help and recover our selves out of this sad and miserable state. And this is a great advantage

to us, to understand the truth of our condition, and the worst of our case ; because a just sense of it will prompt us to seek out for a remedy, and make us ready to embrace it when it is offered to us. And therefore in the

3. Place, the gospel hath plainly discovered to us the way and means of our recovery out of this wretched condition : namely, that in tender commiseration of our miserable and helpless condition, God was pleased to send *his Son*, his *only Son*, into the world to assume our nature, and *to be made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*, to dwell among us, to converse with us, that he might instruct us in the way to happiness, and lead us therein by the example of his own holy life ; and that by his death he might be a propitiation for our sins, and purchase the forgiveness of them, and obtain eternal redemption for us. So that here is an adequate and perfect remedy discovered in the gospel every way answerable to the weakness and impotency, the degeneracy and guilt of mankind, *God having laid help upon one that is mighty, and able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him.* He took our nature upon him, and became man, *that he might bring us to God*, and by restoring us to his image and likeness, might repair those woful ruins which sin hath made in us : and to obtain the pardon and forgiveness of our sins, *God spared not his own Son but freely gave him to death for us all ; and having raised him from the dead, hath sent him to bless us, in turning away every one from our iniquity.* So that by this means the great doubts and fears of mankind, concerning the way of appeasing the offended justice of God, are removed and satisfied. The gospel having given us full assurance, not only that God is reconciled to us, and willing after all our offences and provocations to become our friend ; but that he hath established the way and means of it ; so that *if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world.* And this is a peculiar advantage of the christian religion, to assure us of the forgiveness of sins, of the manner how it is procured, and the certain terms upon

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which it is granted, which neither by the light of nature, nor by any revelation from **GOD**, was clearly discovered before.

4. The gospel hath likewise revealed to us a more certain and perfect law and rule of life. It hath fixed our duty, and made it more plain and certain in all the instances of it, than either the light of nature, or the utmost improvement of that light by philosophy, or than the Jewish religion had done before. It hath cleared our duty in some instances, which the light of nature had left doubtful, or which the subtle disputes of men had made so. It hath heightened our duty in several instances; and those things which had not the clear force of law before, but were only the councils of wiser men, it hath turned into strict precepts, and made them necessary parts of our duty. It commands universal love and kindness, and good will among men, and perfect forgiveness of the greatest injuries and offences; and inculcates these precepts more vehemently, and forbids all malice and revenge more strictly and peremptorily, than any religion or philosophy had done before; as will fully appear to any one that will but attentively read and consider our SAVIOUR's sermon upon the mount.

I cannot now enlarge, in giving a particular account of the excellent laws and precepts of our religion, relating to **GOD**, our neighbour, and our selves; I shall only say of them, that they all tend to the perfection of our nature, and the raising of it to the highest pitch of virtue and goodness that we are capable of in this life, and to qualify and dispose us for the felicity of the next; that they every way conduce to the benefit and advantage of particular persons, singly considered, and to the peace and welfare of human society; in a word, they all conspire in the glory of **GOD**, and the comfort and happiness of man: and no religion that ever was in the world, nor no philosophy, can shew such a system of moral precepts, in which, as there is nothing vain and faulty, so neither is there any thing defective and wanting; so that St. James doth with great reason call it a *perfect law*.

5. The gospel doth also discover and offer to us a most powerful assistance for the aid and encouragement of our obedience, abundant help and strength to enable us to the performance of all that which God requires of us. It offers us wisdom to enlighten our dark minds, and to direct us in doubtful and difficult cases. *James i. 5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* Our SAVIOUR hath promised to give *his holy spirit to them that ask it*, to help our weakness, and to raise our courage, to strengthen us against the power and force of strong and violent temptations, and to assist us in all our conflicts with our spiritual enemies, and to comfort and support us in all our afflictions and sufferings.

And without this, all the other advantages which our religion affords us would signify little. For what would the knowledge of our sinful and miserable state avail us, without power to rescue our selves out of it? what is the pardon of our sins past, without strength against them for the future? what would signify the most complete rule of life, and the most perfect pattern of holiness and virtue, without ability in some measure to observe it and live up to it? without this necessary aid and support, we might despair of resisting the temptations, and mastering the difficulties of a christian course, of subduing the power of bad inclinations, and breaking the force of vicious habits, and bearing up against the violence of extreme suffering and persecution for righteousness sake: without this gracious assistance we can do nothing of all this; and by the help of this, we may become, as St. Paul expresses it, *more than conquerors*.

6. And *lastly*, the gospel hath clearly discovered to us, the eternal rewards and punishments of another world, which are the great incentives and arguments to obedience, and a patient and constant continuance in well-doing. The gospel (as the apostle to the Hebrews tells us) is in this respect *a better covenant than the law, being established upon better promises*, and having the sanction of more severe and terrible threatnings. These great and powerful arguments

arguments to keep mankind within the bounds of their duty, which the wisest of the heathen had some doubt of, and which were but very imperfectly revealed to the Jews, are clearly made manifest by the gospel. So the apostle tells us, that *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*; and that *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. And this gives the gospel a mighty power and influence over the minds of men. Now God commands all men every where to repent, and obey his laws; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. The resurrection of CHRIST from the dead is a sensible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment.

I might proceed to shew, in the *second* place, that as the gospel is a *light*; in respect of its clear discovery of other things to us, so likewise of its self, and its own divine authority.

It is a holy and reasonable doctrine, suitable to the highest and best improved reason of mankind, and plainly tending to our perfection and happiness; both for the sublimity of its mysteries, and the simplicity and excellency of its precepts, every way worthy to have God for its author, and most likely to proceed from him, and from none else. In a word, it is a doctrine in all respects so excellent and perfect, that it is beyond the compass of human understanding to imagine any thing better; and impossible, that any religion, materially differing from this, should be so good. No religion that ever was, or which the wit of man can devise, can give us juster notions of God, a truer account of our selves, better rules of a good life, and arguments more powerful to persuade us to goodness, than the christian religion hath done. And the intrinsic goodness and excellency of any religion, goes half way in the proof of its divinity; to which, if God be pleased to add the external confirmation of plain and unquestionable miracles, it amounts

mounts to a full demonstration, and hath all the evidence that it is possible for any religion to have, that it is from God.

But this is a very large argument, which I have handled in some other discourses *. All therefore that I shall at present add, is an inference or two from what I have been discoursing upon this argument, suited to the solemnity of this season †.

I. We should welcome this light which is come into the world, with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. The doctrine of the gospel is the most glorious light that ever shone upon the world; the best news that ever arrived to mankind. Light is a chearful thing; *the light of the eyes* (says Solomon) *rejoiceth the heart, and good news maketh the bones fat*. When the angel brought the news of our SAVIOUR's birth to the shepherds, with what joy does he relate it to them? Luke xiii. 10, 11. *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a SAVIOUR, which is CHRIST the LORD*. And *Matth. ii. 10*. When the wise men saw the star which pointed at the place of his birth, and conducted them to it, it is said, *they rejoiced with great joy*.

And whenever we commemorate the breaking in of this glorious light upon the world, I mean the birth of our blessed SAVIOUR, how should our hearts be filled with joy, and our mouths with praises! we should every one of us break out into that hymn of the blessed mother of our LORD; *My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath rejoiced in GOD my SAVIOUR, for he hath regarded me and all mankind in our low estate*. He was pleased to come down from heaven, to save us from hell; and to become man, that he might bring us to God; and was contented to be miserable, that he might make us happy; and he did declare this mighty

* See sermons 229, 230, 231, and the preceding sermons in this volume.

† Preached on Christmas-Day.

fection to us, when we were not only unworthy of his love, but even beneath the consideration and regard of his pity ; for *what is man, that God should be thus mindful of him ? or the son of man, that the Son of God should visit him ; that he should condescend to inhabit our nature, and to dwell among us ?* all mankind may with equal or greater reason say, as the centurion once said to him, *LORD we are not worthy that thou shouldst come under our roof.* What means this amazing condescension, that thou shouldest leave thy glory to be thus obscured ; and come from God, to be *despised and rejected of men ;* and quit the regions of bliss and happiness, to become *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief !* was it for us that thou didst all this ? yea for our sakes, who never had done any thing for thine, who may be ashamed to remember, that we were grievous sinners and bitter enemies to thee, when all this was done for us.

Thus we should celebrate the memory of this blessed season, and as often as the year returns, with great joy and thankfulness commemorate the great blessings which this day brought to the world, and say with David, *this is the day which the LORD hath made ; we will be glad and rejoice therein.* Abraham and David saw this day, but far off ; and yet they rejoiced : how should we then be transported with joy, to whom this day is come, and upon whom the Sun of righteousness is long since risen, with healing and salvation under his wings !

II. Let us *walk in this light.* This expression the scripture useth to signify what use we should make of the advantages and opportunities, which by the glorious light of the gospel are afforded to us, *John xii. 35. Walk while ye have the light ; lest darkness come upon you.* *Isaiah vi. 10. For ye were sometimes darkness ; but now are ye light in the LORD : walk therefore as children of the light.* *Rom. xiii. 11, 12, 13, 14. It is now high time to awake out of sleep : for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand : let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly as*

in the day ; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying : but put ye on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

This counsel is proper for Christians at all times, who live under the light of the gospel : but more especially at this time, when we commemorate the coming of this light into the world. Nothing can be more unfit, able and contrary to it, than works of darkness, I mean sin and wickedness, and those abominable vices, which too many are apt to indulge themselves in at this time more especially, such as the apostle names in the text just now mentioned, *rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, contention and quarrelling.* We should at this time more especially *put off* those vices, and *put on the LORD JESUS CHRIST*, that is, be clothed with all these graces and vertues, which in the precepts of his religion, and the example of his life, he hath recommended to us. This is the time when the *Word was made flesh*, and put on our nature : and what return can be more proper for us at this season, than *to put on the LORD JESUS ; and to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof ?*

Nay at this time we should retrench more than usual from our excess and superfluity, both because of the crying necessities of the poor, who are very numerous ; and likewise for the relief of our distressed and persecuted brethren, who are fled to us for shelter from the barbarous rage of their persecutors. What we would have done for the honour of CHRIST at another time, let us now do for the relief of his members ; and whatever kindness we show to them, he will take it as done to himself. We have a great cause to be chearful at this time, and we must testify our joy by feasting, or any other lawful expressions of it : but we must not so feast, as *to forget the affliction of Joseph*, and not *to remember that we also are in the body*, and liable to the same sufferings. We must therefore take heed, that *our table* do not become a snare to us ; and that *our mirth* do not degenerate into sensuality and sin.

Every Christian hath so many arguments against sin, that we should abstain from it at all times : but of all other times we should be most ashamed to be guilty of any lewdness and wickedness, when we are remembring the appearance of the Son of GOD, to bring salvation to us, and to teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

To conclude, let us by all that hath been said be persuaded so to celebrate the memory of CHRIST's first coming, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, that we may with comfort and joy wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great GOD and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, when he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation.

SERMON CCXLIV.

The excellency and universality of the christian revelation, with the sin and danger of rejecting it.

St. JOHN iii. 19.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The second sermon on this text.

IN discoursing on these words, I have already considered the first thing observable in them, viz. The description which is here given of our SAVIOUR and doctrine ; they are called a light. Light is come, that is, the Son of GOD, bringing the doctrine and

knowledge of salvation to the world ; it being one of the first and most obvious properties of *light*, to discover and make visible it self and other things. *That which makes all things manifest, is light* ; and accordingly I have observed, that the christian religion hath made a clear discovery to us of many great and important things, of which the world was either ignorant or doubtful before ; and likewise that it brought great evidence along with it of its own divinity, and that it was from God.

I proceed now to the *second* thing observable in the text, viz. The universal influence of this light. *Light is come into the world.* The doctrine of the gospel was designed for the illumination and instruction, not of one particular place and nation ; but of the whole world. Thus our SAVIOUR and his doctrine are described by old Simeon, Luke ii. 30, 31, 32. *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people : A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* To the Gentiles, who were before in darkness, he is said to be a *light* : but to the Jews, who had the light of divine revelation in some degree before, he is said to be a *glory*, that is, a brighter and more glorious light ; *A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* And John i. 9. he is called *the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* that is, which was sent into the world for the illumination of all mankind. And John viii. 12. he says of himself, *I am the light of the world.*

Now that the revelation of the gospel by Jesus CHRIST was designed for the whole world, for the instruction and comfort and benefit of all mankind, I shall endeavour to make out by these *three* steps.

I. In that it is very credible, that God would sometime or other make such a revelation of his will, might be sufficient to direct and bring mankind to happiness.

II. That before the revelation of the gospel by Jesus CHRIST, no such general and universal declaration of God's will had been made to the world.

III. That the revelation of the gospel hath all the marks and characters of an universal revelation, and was certainly by God designed for that purpose.

I. It is very credible, that God would some time or other, when his infinite wisdom and goodness should think it most fit and seasonable, make such a revelation of his will to the world, as might be sufficient to direct and bring mankind to happiness. The consideration of the divine goodness, is very apt to induce such a persuasion : for what more reasonable to believe concerning God, than that he who is *good to all*, and the common father of all mankind, not *the God of the Jews* only, but *the God of the Gentiles* also (as St. Paul argues to this purpose, in his epistle to the Romans) should some time or other, in pity and compassion of the ignorant and degenerate and helpless condition of mankind, provide some universal remedy, by such a general revelation of his will, as was every way fitted and calculated to be of universal use and benefit, to direct all men in the way to happiness, and if they be not wanting to themselves to bring them in it ; that in the doubtings and uncertainties of mankind concerning the will of God, and the rule of their duty ; he should give an universal law, equally obliging all men to be a perfect and standing rule and measure of their duty in all times and places, and which should never stand in need of any addition, amendment, or alteration.

For why should we think that God, who is so equally related to us all, should confine the effects of his goodness to a few persons or a small part of mankind, to one particular family or nation ? that he whose bounty is so equal and unconfined in the disposing of temporal blessings, should be so partial and narrow in the bestowing of his greatest and best gifts, those spiritual blessings which concern our souls, and our happiness to all eternity ? how can we in reason imagine, that he who *causeth his sun to rise, and his rain to fall* upon the whole world, should vouchsafe that great and most glorious light of his divine and heavenly truth only to a few, and shower down his spiritual blessings upon a small part of the

earth, leaving all the rest of the world, a wilderness and a land of darkness? Thus to think of **GOD**, is no ways agreeable to those large apprehensions which mankind have always had of the goodness of **GOD**, by no means honourable to the divine nature; and therefore it is most highly probable, that **GOD** should one time or other make such a revelation of his will to mankind, as is of universal concernment and advantage.

II. I shall shew that before the revelation of the gospel by **JESUS CHRIST**, no such general and universal declaration of **GOD**'s will hath been made to the world. All the revelations which **GOD** had made to men before, were either made to some particular persons upon particular occasions; or to one particular nation and people, I mean that of the Jews. Those which were made to particular persons were so narrow and limited, and of so private concernment, that they signified nothing to the generality of mankind; nor could the knowledge of them, with any degree of evidence have been propagated. As for that revelation which was made to the Jews, it was both in its nature and design, and in all the circumstances of it, plainly limited to one particular place and nation. And as **GOD** discovered no intention, so neither were there any proper means and endeavours used to proclaim and propagate it, as an universal law and institution obligatory to all mankind.

From the nature and all the circumstances of the Jewish law, it clearly appears to have been designed for a municipal law and constitution, for the governing of one particular people and nation, within a certain territory and spot of ground, to which, a great part of the precepts of it are peculiarly limited, and could be exercised and practised no where else; and not intended to take in and oblige all the nations of the earth. For when this law was first given, **GOD** plainly directs it to the people of Israel, beginning it in this form of words, *Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy GOD is one GOD; and I am the LORD thy GOD, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage; and he frequently tells them, that he had separated them from*

all the people upon the face of the earth, to be a peculiar people to himself ; to be governed by peculiar civil laws, and by a particular way of religious worship ; for which reason the apostle calls the Jewish law and religion, *a wall of partition*, which did separate and divide them from all other people ; so that even towards the strangers that lived among them, they were not bound in several cases to observe the same laws towards them, which they were obliged strictly to observe towards their brethren ; as in the case of usury, and remitting debts, and releasing of servants.

Besides that a great part of their religion was confined to a particular place, which God should appoint, and which at last by his appointment was fixed at the temple at Jerusalem, to which they were obliged to resort thrice every year ; which it was impossible for other nations to do. Not to mention that the great promises and threatenings of that law, were of plenty and prosperity, or a famine and affliction in that land. To all which we may add, that a great part of the laws and ordinances of that religion, were peculiarly fitted and suited to the genius and inclination of that people, and made in condescension to their capacities and prejudices, to the obstinacy and hardness of their hearts.

It is very clear likewise, that God did not design to spread and propagate this law any farther than that people ; since no means were appointed by him, no endeavours were used to that end : no apostles and prophets were sent forth to proclaim and publish this law to other nations ; nay, the providence of God seems rather purposely to have designed to conceal them and their law, till the time drew near of God's revealing to the world a more perfect institution, which should have its rise and beginning there, and from thence be published over the world, according to that of the prophet, that *the law should come out of Sion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem* : but the law which was given by Moses to the Jews, was for many ages in a great measure concealed from the rest of the world. So the psalmist tells us, *psalm cxlvi. 19, 20. He sheweth his word unto Jacob ;*

his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Nay, on the contrary, God had provided by several strict and severe laws, that the people of Israel should have as little commerce and conversation as was possible with other nations; a plain sign he never intended their religion to be propagated among them: but this is so manifest from the nature of the Jewish religion, and all the circumstances of its constitution, that I need not to labour any farther in the proof of it. I proceed therefore to shew, in the

III. and *last* place, that the revelation of the gospel hath all the marks and characters of an universal revelation, and was certainly designed by God for that end. And this will clearly appear, by considering these four things.

1. The person by whom God was pleased to make this revelation to the world.

2. The nature and design of it.

3. The prophecies and predictions concerning it. And

4. The remarkable countenance and assistance which was given from heaven to the first publishers of it.

1. If we consider the person by whom God was pleased to make this revelation to the world, we cannot think that God had any less design therein, than the recovery and reformation of mankind. Now the person employed by God to make this revelation of his will was the eternal, and only begotten Son of God, assuming our nature and appearing in it; I say the eternal and only begotten Son of God. So the apostle to the Hebrews describes him, and thereby distinguisheth him from all the former prophets, by whom in former ages God had made particular revelations of himself to men. *Heb. i. 1, 2, 3* God who at sundry times (or by several parts and degrees) and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets; but in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds: who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power

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What a character is here of the greatest and most glorious person, that ever was employed to men ! a messenger of God to man ; and who so fit as *the Son of God*, who came from *the bosom of his father* to reveal his will to all mankind ? who so proper as he, who made the world, and upholds and preserves it, to be sent upon so great an errand, as the recovery and salvation of the whole world ? and on the contrary, who so unfit, as this great and glorious person, to be employed in any less and lower design, than that which was of general concernment to the benefit and happiness of all mankind ? so great an ambassador was not fit to be sent to treat of any thing less than an universal peace, and the reconciliation of the whole world.

And then if we consider him, as assuming human nature, and thereby equally related to all mankind, it was fit he should be concerned for that whole race of creatures to whom he had so nearly allied himself, and whose nature he had vouchsafed to assume. It became him, who became man, to shew himself a lover of mankind, to reveal the will of God, and the way to happiness, to all men, to be an universal teacher and lawgiver ; that by the direction of his doctrine, and the obedience of his laws, *all men might come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.*

2. If we consider the nature of this revelation, it will appear to be designed for the general use and benefit of mankind. The matters revealed, whether concerning God or our selves, this world or the other, are of universal concernment. The laws of this religion are not calculated for any particular place or nation, one more than another ; and the arguments and encouragements to the obedience of these laws, are equally fitted to work upon all capacities and conditions, and apt to affect them alike, because they equally touch the interests and concernments of all men : for since all men are equal in the immortal duration of their souls, and equally obnoxious to the judgment of God in another world, it concerns all men alike to understand their duty, and the way to gain the favour of God, and

and thereby to escape the endless and intolerable miseries, and to obtain the unspeakable and everlasting happiness of another world: and to direct, and excite men hereto, the whole revelation of the gospel, all the doctrines, and all the laws of it, do plainly tend. There is nothing in the christian religion, but what is fit for all men to know and practise, in order to their present peace and comfort, and their future and eternal happiness; and these things surely are of universal and equal concernment to all mankind.

3. The predictions and prophecies concerning the MESSIAS, and the doctrine which should be delivered to the world, do plainly shew, that this revelation should be universal. In the first promise to Abraham, it is plainly foretold, that *in his seed*, that is, as the Jews always understood it, in the MESSIAS, *all the nations of the earth should be blessed*. And there are innumerable predictions in the prophets of the old testament to this purpose. I shall mention but a few of many, *Psal. li. 8. Ask of me, (saith GOD to his Son) and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.* *Psal. lxxii. 17. speaking of the MESSIAS, men shall be blessed in him, all nations shall call him blessed.* *Isa. xlix. 6. I will give thee (saith GOD concerning him) for a light to the Gentiles, that thou may'st be my salvation to the ends of the earth.*

4. And lastly, this revelation was actually published to the world, GOD giving remarkable countenance and assistance from heaven to the first preachers and publishers of it.

The apostles of our LORD and SAVIOUR, in virtue of his commission, and by his express command just before his ascension, went forth and published his doctrine to the world. Having upon the day of *pentecost*, according to his promise which he made to them before his death, and renewed to them before his resurrection when he was going to his father, I say, having according to his express promise, received the miraculous gifts of the HOLY GHOST, they began to publish the gospel first to the Jews; and being rejected by the

greater

greatest part of them, they preached it to the Gentiles; and as a confirmation of the doctrine which they preached, they witnessed the resurrection of CHRIST from the dead, as the great evidence of the truth of his doctrine; and to give confirmation to this testimony, GOD enabled them to work miracles, and particularly to raise the dead to life, which was a confirmation of their testimony beyond all exception: and in order to the more speedy and effectual propagation of this doctrine, GOD was pleased to work a strange miracle never wrought upon any occasion before or since; he endowed the apostles and first preachers of christianity with a power of speaking all languages, which they had occasion in their travels to make use of, without ever having studied or learned them; and this miraculous gift was common to all the apostles, and continued till the gospel was published by them in most parts of the then known world; greater evidence than which GOD cannot be imagined to give of his design to communicate the knowledge of this doctrine universally, and to all nations; and if it was rejected in some places, and the progress of it obstructed in others, this doth not hinder but that GOD designed it to be universally known, and that it is in its own nature fit to be a law to all mankind; and GOD who in his secret council hath not thought fit as yet to grant the knowledge of this doctrine of salvation to some parts of the world, may in his due time send this *light* into those *dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of barbarousness and cruelty*, and grant the knowledge of salvation to them. In the mean time, what cause have we to bless GOD, to whom this light came so soon, and who have enjoyed it so long: *let us walk in the light, while we have it; lest darkness overtake us.*

And thus much may suffice to have spoken of the second particular which I observed in the text, namely, the universal influence of this light; *light is come into the world.*

I proceed to speak briefly to the *third* particular I mentioned, viz. the excellency and advantages of this doctrine

doctrine of the christian religion, above any other doctrine or institution, even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God. They are all but *darkness* in comparison of it. *Light is come into the world.* But in this I have in a great measure prevented my self, in what I have already discoursed upon the *two* former heads, and therefore I shall say the less upon it: for by what I have already said, it will in good measure appear, how obscure and imperfect the discoveries both of *natural* light, and of the Jewish religion were, in comparison of the clear and bright revelation of the gospel; and *that* both concerning the nature of God, and the worship which is most suitable and acceptable to him; and likewise concerning the rule of our duty, and the rewards and punishments of another life which are the great motives and arguments to obedience and which as to the greatest part of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, had but a very weak and faint influence before. And how could it well be otherwise, since the apprehensions of mankind concerning these things were dark and doubtful.

What gross and imperfect notions the heathen had concerning God, we may judge by their universal and abominable idolatry. How uncertain their morality was (which yet was much the best part of *heathenism*) we may see by their endless differences and disputes concerning moral duties. How wavering they were concerning the immortality of souls, and the rewards of another world, we may judge by the different and contrary opinions of the greatest philosophers about these points. *that heathenism* was plainly defective, both in the knowledge of God, which is the great foundation of all religion; and the precepts of a good life, which are the rule of it; and the assurance of immortality, which is the great motive to religion, and the only solid comfort and support of the mind of man under the evils and afflictions of life, and against the fears of death.

And the Jewish religion likewise, though it had manifold advantages of *paganism*, yet was it very short and imperfect in many of these respects which I have mentioned.

oned : besides that gave no clear and well grounded assurance of the pardon and forgiveness of sins ; and the rewards of another world were very obscurely revealed under that dispensation. So that well might the apostle, upon comparison of the law and the gospel, say, *the law made nothing perfect : but the bringing in of a better hope did.*

And as for evidence which those religions had, *paganism* pretended to no other authority for their idolatrous worship, but the long custom and practice of the world. This *Symmachus* the heathen insists upon, instead of all other arguments, *Sequimur majores nostros, qui feliciter secuti sunt suos ; we follow our forefathers, who happily followed theirs.*

The Jewish religion indeed produced good evidence that it was from God ; but it is very destitute of arguments to prove, that it was either an universal, or perfect, or final revelation of God's will to mankind ; say it was expressly said in their law, that God *would raise up another prophet among them, to whom they were toarken, and to be obedient in all things.* The MESSIAS was plainly foretold, and spoken of both in the law and the prophets, as one that was to be the author of a more perfect law and institution, which in due time was to be revealed to the whole world, *to be a light to lighten the Gentiles*, as well as to be *the glory of the people of Israel* : and accordingly in the fulness of time he came, and by a greater confirmation of miracles, than the Jewish religion had, he put a period to that weak and imperfect institution : and to shew that the law of Moses was at an end, God hath now for above 1600 years taken away their place and nation, destroyed their temple, and laid waste their country, and dispersed them over the world ; so that they are not capable of observing a great part of their religion. By all which it appears, that whatever was in the world before, was but *darkness*, in comparison of the glorious light of the gospel ; so that well might our evangelist say, *this light was the true light, which coming into the world, enlightens every man ; the true light by way of excellency and eminency ; as our*

SAVIOUR

SAVIOUR calls himself *the true bread which came down from heaven*; so the doctrine of the gospel is called *the true light*, in opposition to those *false or imperfect lights* which were in the world before. This doctrine of the christian religion is a perfect, and therefore a final discovery of the will of God to man; because it can receive no amendment, therefore it shall never have any change or alteration.

I will conclude this particular with that inference which the apostle to the Hebrews makes, from the consideration of the perfection and unchangeableness of the gospel dispensation, which he calls *A kingdom which cannot be shaken*, Heb. xii. 28, 29. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.* The better, and more perfect, and more unchangeable our religion is, the better we should be; the more steadfastly should we persist in the sincere profession and practice of it; and if we do not, the heavier will be our condemnation; *For our God is a consuming fire.* I proceed to the

Fourth particular observable in the text, viz. The great unreasonableness of rejecting this doctrine of the gospel. It is to make the absurdest judgment and choice that is possible; to prefer darkness before light. *Man loved darkness rather than light*; that is, they chose rather to continue in their former ignorance, than to entertain this most clear and perfect discovery of God's will to mankind. And what can be more absurd and unreasonable, when the difference is so palpable, and the choice so plain? that man is blind that cannot distinguish *light* from *darkness*; and he is very perverse and obstinate, who seeing the difference between them, will *choose darkness rather than light*. Such was the unreasonableness of those who rejected the gospel when it was revealed to the world; since nothing is more clear to an impartial and considerate man, than that the christian religion is the best and most perfect institution, of the greatest and most universal concernment to mankind, that ever was revealed to men; and our blessed SAVIOUR, who

who was the author and founder of this religion, gave greater evidence that he came from God, than any other prophet or teacher that ever was ; and the worship of God which this religion prescribes, is most agreeable to his nature, being a spiritual and a reasonable service; fit for men to give, and for God to accept. In a word, the precepts of the gospel are more excellent in themselves, and better calculated for the happiness and perfection of human nature ; and the motives and arguments to persuade men to the obedience of these precepts, more powerful than those of any other religion that ever yet appeared in the world.

So that the difference between the christian religion, and all others that have been received and profest in the world ; is so plain and apparent, that nothing but passion, prejudice, or interest, or some other faulty principle, can hinder any man from yielding his assent to christianity. The comparison is almost equal to that betwixt light and darkness ; and therefore our SAVIOUR had great reason to speak so severely of the infidelity of the Jews who rejected such a doctrine, propounded to them with so much evidence and advantage. And because the Jews are the great scripture pattern of perverse infidelity and opposition to the truth, it will not be amiss to take our estimate and measure of the unreasonableness of this spirit and temper, from the properties and characters which we find of it in the Jews, most of which do still inseparably accompany the spirit of infidelity wherever it is ; that as face answers face in water, so does the infidelity of this present age resemble that of the Jews in our SAVIOUR's time, in all those perverse and unreasonable qualities which did then attend it ; and therefore I shall take notice of some of the chief of them, as I find them dispersed up and down in the history of the new testament.

But this, and what remains to be said upon this argument, I must reserve for another discourse,

SERMON CCXLV.

The excellency and universality of the christian revelation, with the sin and danger of rejecting it.

St. JOHN iii. 19.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The third sermon on this text.

WHEN I began to discourse on these words, I observed in them several particulars. As,

First, the description which is here given of our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, by the metaphor of *light*. *Light is come.*

Secondly, the universal influence of this light. *Light is come into the world.*

Thirdly, the excellency and advantages of the doctrine of the gospel, above any other doctrine or institution even that of the Jewish religion, which was likewise immediately from God. They are all but *darkness*, in comparison with this. *Light is come into the world; and men loved darkness.*

These *three* I have dispatched, and have entered upon the *fourth* particular observable in my text, viz.

The great unreasonableness of rejecting this doctrine of the gospel. It is to make the absurdest judgment and choice that is possible, to prefer *darkness* before *light*. *Men loved darkness rather than light.* The difference between the christian religion and all others is so very plain, that our SAVIOUR had great reason to speak the

severe

severely of the infidelity of the Jews. And because the Jews are the great scripture pattern of perverse infidelity, I proposed the taking an estimate of the unreasonableness of this spirit, and temper, from the characters which we find of it in that people, most of which do still inseparably attend the spirit of infidelity, wherever it is. I shall therefore take notice of some of the chief of those characters, as I find them dispersed up and down in the history of the new testament, and they are these which follow.

I. Monstrous partiality, in denying and rejecting that revelation, which had not only as great but greater evidence, than other things which they did believe, and were ready enough to entertain. They *believed Moses and the prophets*; and the great confirmation which was given to them, was by the miracles which GOD wrought by them. Those miracles they did not see themselves; but received them from the testimony of their forefathers, being brought down to them by a very credible and uncontrol'd revelation, which they had no reason to doubt of the truth of: but they themselves saw the miracles which our SAVIOUR wrought, which were more and greater than the miracles of Moses and all the prophets, so that they were eye-witnesses of that divine power which accompanied our SAVIOUR; and yet they rejected him and his doctrine; nay so unequally did they deal with him, that after they had rejected him, notwithstanding all the evidence which he gave that *he came from God*, they greedily received and ran after false prophets, who gave no such testimony. So our SAVIOUR foretels concerning them, *John v. 43.* And so afterwards it came to pass, *I am come*, saith he, *in my father's name*, that is, have given sufficient evidence that he sent me, and ye received me not; if another shall come in his own name, him will ye receive. In his own name, that is, without any miracles to prove that he comes from God. And to shew their horrible partiality yet more, after they had refused the clearest testimony that God could give of him, they were contented to accept of the dis-

agreeing testimony of two witnesses against him, and upon that uncertain evidence to put him to death.

And this hath been the temper of those that oppose the truth in all ages, and in all kind of matters. Thus the church of Rome will needs understand those words of our SAVIOUR, *this is my body*, in the sense of transubstantiation, contrary to the plain intention of them, and in contradiction to the reason and senses of all mankind; and yet they will not understand the plain institution of the sacrament in both kinds. And thus the atheists, who will not believe that there is a God, which made the world, can yet swallow things ten times harder to be believed; as that either the world was eternal of its self, or the matter of it; and that the parts of this matter being in perpetual motion, did after infinite trials and attempts at last happen to settle in this order in which we now are; that is, that this admirable frame of the world, which hath all the characters upon it of deep wisdom and contrivance, was made merely by chance, and without direction and design of any intelligent author; so partial is infidelity, as to assent to the most absurd things rather than believe the revelations of God, or to own those principles, which are naturally imprinted upon the minds of men, and have the general consent of mankind.

II. Another usual concomitant of infidelity is unreasonable and groundless prejudice. The Jews were strangely prejudiced against our SAVIOUR, and that upon the weakest and slightest ground, as that his original was known among them. *John vii. 27. Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when CHRIST cometh no man knoweth whence he is.* Surely they were very ready to take exceptions against him, that would urge this for an objection; for what if his original were known, might he not be from God for all that? Moses was a great prophet, and yet it was very well known from whence he was; and it was no where said in the old testament that his original should be unknown; nay on the contrary it was plainly declared, that he was to be of the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of David, and to come out of Bethlehem.

Another

Another prejudice against him was the meanness of his parents, and of the manner of his education. *Matth. iii. 54. Whence hath this man his wisdom, and these mighty works? is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simeon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? whence then hath this man all these things? and they were offended in him.* And so likewise, *John ii. 15. How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* a strange kind of unreasonable prejudice? they would not believe him to be an extraordinary person, because his parents and relations, his birth and manner of breeding were so mean, because he had been brought up to a trade, and not bred up like one of their Scribes and Rabbies; as if God could not inspire a man with all those gifts which men ordinarily acquire by study and pains; and as if it had not been reasonable to expect, that the MESSIAS, who they believed was to be the greatest prophet that ever was, should be thus inspired. Now in all reason the argument is strong the other way, that sure he was an extraordinary prophet, who all in a sudden gave such evidence of his great knowledge and wisdom, and did such mighty works; because this could not be imputed to his breeding and education, since that was so mean, and therefore there must be something extraordinary and divine in it; thus another man who had been free from prejudice, would have been apt to reason.

Another unreasonable prejudice was grounded upon a spiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our SAVIOUR was brought up, namely, Galilee, *John. i. 46. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* And *John vii. 41. Shall CHRIST, that is, the MESSIAS, come out of Galilee?* And *ver. 52. Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.* Nathaniel indeed, who was a sincere good man, was easily wrought off from his prejudice, and was contented to be convinced of the contrary by plain evidence, when Philip desired him to come and see, *John i. 47.* But the Jews it seems laid great weight upon it, as if this one thing had been

enough to confute all our SAVIOUR's miracles, and after they had shot this bolt at him, the matter had been clearly concluded against him.

But wise and unprejudiced men do not use to be swayed and carried away with ill natured proverbs ; nor do they believe the bad characters which are given of a country, to be universally true without exception, as if every country did not yield some brave spirits, and excellent persons, whatever the general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be observed to be ; or as if a man could not be an inspired prophet, unless he were bred in a good air ; nor be sent by GOD, unless men approved the place from whence he came. The Brachians, among the Greeks, were a heavy and dull people even to a proverb ; and yet Pindar a great poet and wise was born in that country. The Scythians were so barbarous, that one would have thought surely no good could come thence ; and yet they yielded Anacharsis none of the meanest of the philosophers. The Idumeans were *aliens and strangers from the common-wealth of Israel* ; and yet Job, one of the most excellent persons that ever lived, was born among them. God can bring forth eminent instruments out of any place and nation he pleases, *out of stones raise up children unto Abraham*. Our conceits are no rule to him, nor does he govern the world by our foolish proverbs ; *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts*.

And thus some in our days have endeavoured to stifle the reformation, by calling it *the Northern heresy* ; as if the light of truth were at as great a distance from the Northern parts, as that of the sun, and nothing but error and heresy could come thence ; which is just such a conceit, and grounded upon as wise a reason as that of the Donatists, who would needs have truth and the catholic church confined to Africk, because that was the southern part of the world, and because it is said in the song of Solomon, concerning the church, *tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, and where thou makest thy flocks to rest at noon*.

Another mighty prejudice against our SAVIOUR we find mentioned *John vii. 48. Have any of the rulers or pharisees believed on him?* for this there seems to be some better colour than for the other; because the example of superiors and of persons thought to be more knowing, is considerable indeed in a doubtful case, and a good rule of action when we have no better; but ought to be of no force to sway our judgment against clear and convincing evidence. Zedekiah and the princes of Judah would not hearken to Jeremiah: yet was he a true prophet for all that, though it was not their pleasure to think so. Sometimes there is a gross and palpable corruption in those who ought to be guides to others, and they have a visible interest in opposing and rejecting the truth. And this was the case of the pharisees and rulers among the Jews, in our SAVIOUR's time. Any one that had known them and judged impartially concerning them, would rather have chosen to have followed any example than theirs. Religion may sometimes be in greatest danger, from those who ought to understand it best, and to be the greatest supports of it. So it was of old among the Jews, when the prophet complains that *their leaders had caused them to err*: and so it hath been among Christians, in the great degeneracy of the Roman church; their popes and their general councils, as they call them, have been the great corrupters of christianity, and seducers of Christendom; which made Luther to say, with truth and sharpness enough; *religio nunquam magis periclitatur quam inter reverendissimos: religion is never in greater danger than amongst the most reverend*, meaning the pope and the cardinals; when those who ought to teach and reform others, are guilty of the greatest errors and corruptions themselves.

I will mention but one prejudice more, which we find *John ix. 16. This man* (says the Jews concerning our SAVIOUR) *is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath-day.* This indeed had been a considerable exception, if it had been true, and therefore our SAVIOUR takes great care to vindicate himself from this aspersion; he shews that the law of the sabbath did not oblige in all cases,

cases, and that being a positive precept, it ought to give place to moral duties, which are of perpetual obligation, and therefore he bids them *go and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice*; and the plain meaning of that saying was, that when positive institutions interfere with any moral duty, they cease to oblige in that case; that the sabbath was designed for the ease and benefit of men, and not for their grievance and burden; and therefore where the life of man is concerned, the law of the sabbath ceaseth; as in case of necessity, *David did eat of the shew-bread, and was blameless*, though by a positive law it was forbidden for any man to eat of it, but the priests only. Lastly, from a general practice in a common case among themselves, it being allowed by their own law, *to take an ox or an ass out of a pit on the sabbath-day*; and therefore much more to heal one on the sabbath-day, and *to loose a daughter of Abraham, that had been bound eighteen years*, as our SAVIOUR invincibly argues.

Upon the like prejudice several churches and communions in the world, will not allow others to be good Christians, and in a state of salvation, because they do not lay the same weight that they do upon positive institutions, not of divine, but of mere ecclesiastical authority, in which they are more unreasonable than the Jews. * But I proceed to a

III. Concomitant of their infidelity, and this was a childish kind of perverseness. Being strongly prejudiced against our SAVIOUR, they were so peevish and forward, that nothing would satisfy them. And of this he himself gives us a remarkable instance, *Mattb. xi. 16, 17. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? it is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.* The business was this, the Jews found fault with John the Baptist, because his habit and conversation was so rough and severe; and yet our SAVIOUR could not please them neither; who was of a quite different

* Of this see more, vol. vii. serm. 117, 118, 119.

temper.

temper. *John the Baptist came in the way of righteousness, and they received him not* ; his way was very strict and severe, *he came neither eating nor drinking*, was very strict in his diet and manner of living, of a course carriage and melancholy temper ; and *they said he had a devil*. He was to be a preacher of repentance, and his garb was suitable to his employment. Our SAVIOUR was of a more easy and familiar and conversible temper, suitable to a preacher of pardon and forgiveness ; *the son of man came eating and drinking* ; and *they said, behold a wine-bibber and a glutton, a friend of publicans and sinners*. Now what could be more childish and perverse, than to be pleased with nothing ? by this it plainly appeared, that whatever garb he had put on, whatever his carriage had been, they would have found fault with it, and have made some exception against it ; at this rate it was impossible for him to escape the censure of men so perversely disposed ; and therefore our SAVIOUR justly compares them to *children playing in the markets*, who were neither pleased with *mourning* nor *dancing*.

And this is the humour of infidelity, and of those who oppose the truth, to cavil and make exceptions at every thing, and to argue against religion and the principles of it, from contrary topicks, and arguments that are inconsistent with one another.

There are other instances of this perverseness in the Jews ; as that when they believed Moses, and had a mighty veneration for him ; yet they would not believe him when he testified concerning the MESSIAS. So likewise they looked upon John the Baptist as a prophet ; but yet would give no credit to his testimony concerning CHRIST. Nay, so froward were they, that when our SAVIOUR had wrought the greatest and plainest miracle that could be, in *feeding 5000 persons with five loaves, and two little fishes* ; yet as if this had been nothing, they still call upon him to work a miracle, *John vi. 30. What sign workest thou, that we may see and believe ?*

IV. Another usual concomitant of infidelity, is obstinacy, and pertinacious persisting in error. This likewise was the temper of the Jews, not to be convinced by any evidence

evidence that could be offered to them. When our SAVIOUR had several times put them to silence, so that they were not able to answer him ; yet they obstinately persisted in their former conceit, and stiffly held the conclusion, though they were not able to make good the premises, *Matth. xxii.* Our SAVIOUR confuted the sadducees about the resurrection, and put them to silence, and then undertook the pharisees, and they could not answer him neither ; both of them continued in their opinion, though each of them thought the other to be clearly baffled and confuted.

This obstinacy of theirs our SAVIOUR makes a great aggravation of their infidelity, *Matth. xxi. 31, 32.* *Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not : but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

Nay, which was the most unreasonable of all, when they could not answer his arguments, nor deny the miracles which he wrought, yet they were resolved not to believe on him, nor to suffer others to confess him. *John xi. 47, 48.* After he had wrought that great miracle, in raising Lazarus from the dead, after he had lain four days in the grave, they were so far from owning themselves convinced by it, that hereupon they took counsel to put him to death. So the text tells us, that *many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which JESUS had done, namely, the raising of Lazarus, believed on him : but some of them went their way to the pharisees, and told them what things JESUS had done.* And now one would have thought, that either they should not have acknowledged this mighty miracle ; or if they had, that they should have been convinced by it that he was from GOD : but the miracle was so notorious, that they could not deny it ; and they were so obstinately set against him, that they would not be convinced by it, they granted the premises, and yet denied the conclusion, *ver. 47.* *Then gathered the chief priests and pharisees*

a coun

council, and said, *what do we ? for this man doth
any miracles ; if we let him alone, all men will believe
him.* And it follows, *ver. 53. From that day forth
they took counsel together to put him to death.*

And after he was risen from the dead, and those
that bare witness to his resurrection had their testimony
confirmed by miracles, yet the Jews continued in the
same obstinacy, as if they were resolved to oppose the
gospel in despite of all evidence that could be brought
for it. So we find, *Acts iv. 15, 16.* that when the
rulers and scribes beheld the man whom the apostles had
healed, standing by them, it is said, *they could say nothing
against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside
out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying,
what shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable
miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them
that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it : but that
it spread no farther among the people, let us straitly threaten
them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.*
What could be more unreasonable, than to own the
miracle, and yet to reject the testimony ?

V. Another quality which accompanied this spirit of
infidelity and opposition to the truth in the Jews, was
want of patience to consider and examine what could be
said for the truth ; a hastiness to pronounce and pass
sentence, before they had heard what could be said for
it. Thus the pharisees, when they saw our SAVIOUR
cast out devils, they presently, without any farther con-
sideration, pronounce, that he did it *by the prince of de-
mons,* *Matth. xii. 44.* Had they not been headily carried
on by passion and prejudice, they would never have
cast this rash sentence. Had they but had patience to
have considered matters, they could not have believed,
that the devil was confederate with CHRIST against
himself, and the interest of his own kingdom.

And as it was then, so it is at this day ; many conti-
nue in unbelief and error, not because there is not evi-
dence enough for the things proposed to their belief, but
because they have not patience enough to consider what
may be said for them, Nay, in the church of Rome,
that

that they may retain their people in their communion they strictly forbid all examination of their religion, or so much as to hear or read what can be said against it because this is doubting, and doubting is next to infidelity, a mortal sin, and a temptation of the devil. There is but one season and nick of time, wherein they will allow any of the people to examine and enquire into matters of religion, and that is when they would gain a man to their religion, and they allow it then only because they cannot help it. Some reasons they must offer to persuade men to be of their church; and when they offer them, they must allow them to consider them, and judge of the force of them, though they had much rather they would take their words for the strength and goodness of them; for they do what they can to hinder them from advising with those that will dispute the matter with them; or if they cannot prevent examination, yet they divert them as much as they can from any particular enquiry into their doctrines and practices; this they pretend is a tedious and endless course, and therefore they commonly direct them to a shorter way, which is, not to enquire first into the truth of their doctrines, and the goodness of their worship and practice; but first to find out the true church, and then learn of her what doctrines and practices are truly christian; and by this means they get their religion swallowed whole, without any particular examination of their doctrines and practices, which will not bear the tryal; and therefore to make the work short, they take it for granted, that there is always a visible catholick church; that this church is infallible in all matters of faith; and that the Roman church is this visible infallible catholick church, because no other church pretends to be so; as indeed there is no reason why any particular church should pretend to be the catholick or universal, or to speak plainer, why a part should pretend to be the whole; and all this being admitted, there is nothing more now to be done, but to receive all the doctrines which this church teacheth, without any farther examination of them, be-

cause

because this church being supposed to be infallible, all that she says must be true, though it appears to be never so contrary to scripture, or reason, or sense. But now in this way of proceeding, there are two or three things which seem to be very odd.

1. That men must take their religion in the lump, and not be allowed to examine the particular doctrines and practices of it ; which is to say, they have an excellent religion, but men must by no means examine it, nor look into it. This looks so suspiciously, that a wise man, for this very reason, if there were no other, would reject it ; because they are so afraid to bring it to the tryal.

2. It seems likewise very strange, that when they go to make profelytes, they should take so many things which are in question and controversy between us, for granted ; as that the church in every age is infallible ; and that the church of Rome is the infallible and catholic church. They meet indeed sometimes with some easy and willing converts, that will meet them thus far, that is, more than half way : but what if a man will not take all this for granted, but will put them to the proof of it ? why then he is not so civil as they hoped and expected ; and commonly they give over tempting him, or at least depart from him for a season, till they can find him in a more pliable temper ; for it is a long work, and requires a great deal of time to prove some things, especially to the dull capacity of a northern heretick : besides that some things are stubborn, and will not be proved, though never so much pains be taken to do it ; and so are the propositions now mentioned, towards the proof whereof I never saw any argument offered, that is within distance, or indeed within sight of the conclusion. And then,

3. It seems a very strange method of coming to know what the true doctrines of christianity are, by first knowing which is the true church : for it is not the church which makes the doctrines of christianity to be true, but the profession of the true christian doctrine which makes the church : and therefore we must first know which are

the true doctrines of christianity, the profession whereof makes the true church, before we can possibly know which is the true church ; but which are the true doctrines of christianity is not to be known but by a particular examination of them, and comparing them with the rule of the christian faith, *the word of God*. But they that have a mind to delude men, and keep them in error, must never admit their religion to be tried by this rule. But to proceed,

VI. Another quality which accompanies infidelity and opposition to the truth, is rudeness and boisterousness, falling into uncivil terms and reproachful names. Such was the carriage of the Jews towards our SAVIOUR ; when they were not able to reason with him, they fell to railing at him, *John viii. 48*. When he argued against their infidelity in the calmest manner, and by the strongest and clearest arguments endeavoured to convince them of the unreasonableness of it : *Which of you saith he, convinceth me of sin ? And if I speak the truth why do you not believe ? He that is of God, beareth Gods words ; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God*. Then answered the Jews, *Say we not well, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil ?* They presently call him *beretick* ; for so the Jews esteemed the Samaritans.

VII. Another quality near a-kin to this, is fury and outrageous passion, *John vii. 23*. The Jews were in great passion against our SAVIOUR, for *healing on the sabbath-day*. When the apostles wrought miracles, it is said, that *the high priest and they that were with him were filled with indignation*. And when St. Stephen preached to them, it is said, *they gnashed on him with their teeth*. And St. Paul acknowledgeth of himself while he opposed the truth of christianity, he was *made against all that were of that way*.

VIII. And lastly, to mention no more, infidelity and opposition to the truth is usually attended with blood and inhuman persecution ; a certain argument of a weak cause, and which wants better means of conviction. Thus the Jews treated our SAVIOUR ; when they could

deal with him by reason, they persecuted him, and sought to kill him, *John v. 16. and chap. viii. 59.* When our SAVIOUR had answered all their objections, and they had nothing to reply upon him, *they took up stones to cast at him*; a sign their reasons were spent, and that their arguments were at an end. Thus infidelity and error betrays its own weakness and want of reason on its side, by making use of such brutish and unreasonable weapons in its own defence. Our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles never thought of propagating their religion by these inhuman and barbarous ways. These methods are proper to the *destroyer*; but not to the *Lamb of God, and Saviour of men.* *The Son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them*; to do good to the bodies and to the souls of men; and not to destroy their bodies, no not in order to the saving of their souls. All the means that he or his apostles used, were teaching and persuading, and that with great meekness: *learn of me, for I am meek*, saith our LORD: and the apostles everywhere command the teachers of this religion, *to shew all gentleness to all men, and in meekness to instruct those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.* They did not attempt to convert men by armed force, and ways of violence and cruelty. It is a sign that reason runs very low with that religion, which hath no better arguments to persuade men to it, than *dragons*, and the *gallies*; these are *carnal*, and therefore not *christian weapons.* St. Paul tells us, *the weapons of our warfare are not carnal*; and yet they were *mighty through God, to subdue* great part of the world to the belief and obedience of the christian religion. Thus I have done with the *fourth* particular in the text, the unreasonableness of infidelity, and opposition to the truth. The *two* remaining ones I will dispatch in a few words.

Fifthly therefore, I observed the true reason and account of mens opposition to the truth and rejection of it; *men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* And indeed *darkness* is more suitable to a wicked and vicious life, because the deformity of it is

not so easily discovered as in the *light* ; this makes the evil of mens actions more manifest, and their faults more inexcusable. Men may pretend other reasons for their infidelity and opposition of the truth, and may seem to argue against the principles of religion in good earnest, and against the reasonableness and truth of christianity, from a real contrary persuasion ; but no man that hath these things fairly proposed to him, and with all the advantages they are capable of, and hath the patience to consider the true nature and design of the christian doctrine, but must acknowledge it, not only to be the most reasonable, but the most divine, most likely to come from God, and to make men like to God, of any religion that ever yet appeared in the world. If any man reject it, it is not because he hath good and sufficient reasons against it ; but because he is swayed by some unreasonable prejudice or passion, or byassed by some lust or interest, which he is strongly addicted to, and loth to part with, and yet he must part with it, if he entertain this religion, and submit himself to the terms and rules of it. This is that which commonly lies at the bottom of infidelity, and is the true reason of their opposition to the truth, that *their deeds are evil*. And it is natural for every man to defend himself, and justify his doings as well as he can ; and if religion be clearly against him, to set himself with all the despite and malice he can against religion, and to hate, and with all his might to oppose that which contradicts that course which he is in love with, and is resolved to continue in : for as our SAVIOUR reasons in a like case, *No man can serve two masters ; but either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or he will cleave to the one, and quit the other*. Men cannot entertain the truth, and retain their lusts ; and therefore as our SAVIOUR tells us immediately after the text, *Every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd*. The light of truth is as grievous to a bad man, as the light of the sun is to sore eyes ; because it lays open and discovers the faults and vices of men, and if they entertain it,

will

will urge them, and put them upon a necessity of reforming their wicked lives ; and because they have no mind to this, therefore they resist the light, and endeavour to keep it out. The vices and lusts of men are so many diseases ; and men naturally loath physick, and put it off as long as they can ; and this makes many inconsiderate and wilful men to favour their disease, and take part with it against all counsel and advice ; and when the great physician of souls comes and offers them a remedy, they slight and reject him, and will rather perish than follow his prescriptions.

And this was the true reason why the Jews rejected the gospel ; they were vicious in their lives, and loth to undergo the severity of a cure ; they were not willing to be saved by so sharp and unpleasant a remedy. And this is still the true reason at this day, of mens enmity and opposition to religion, because it declares against their evil deeds, and proclaims open war against those vices and lusts which they love, and are resolved to live in ; so that they have no other way to justify themselves and their actions, but by condemning and rejecting that which reproveth and finds fault with them.

And here I might shew more particularly, that there are *two* accounts to be given why bad men are so apt to resist and reject the divine truth, even when it is revealed and proposed to them in the fairest manner, and with the clearest evidence.

1. Because their minds are not so rightly prepared and disposed for the receiving of divine truth. And,

2. Because they have an interest against it, *their designs and deeds are evil*, they have some worldly interest to carry on, or they are in love with some vice or lust which they cannot reconcile with the truths of God and religion. But this I have done at large elsewhere *. I proceed therefore to the

Sixth and last particular in the text, namely, the great guilt of those who reject the doctrine of the gospel. By this very act of theirs they are condemned, nay they

* See vol. vi. sermons 87, 88, and 89.

condemn themselves ; because they reject the only means of their salvation. *This is the condemnation*, this very thing argues the height of their folly and guilt, that *when light is come*, they prefer *darkness* before it. If any thing will condemn men this will ; and if any thing will aggravate their condemnation, and make it above measure heavy and intolerable, this will. If it were in a doubtful matter that men made so ill and foolish a choice, the thing would admit of some excuse : but the dispute is between *light* and *darkness*. If the christian religion had not so plainly the advantage of any other institution that ever was ; if that holiness which the gospel commands, and that happiness which it promiseth, were not infinitely to be preferred before the ways of sin and death ; the unbeliever and the disobedient might have something to say for themselves : but the case is plainly otherwise, so that whoever having the christian religion fairly and fully proposed to him, doth not believe it ; or professing to believe it, doth not live according to it, *hath no cloak for his sin* ; neither the one for his infidelity, nor the other for his disobedience ; and if any thing will aggravate the condemnation of men, this will ; for the greater light men sin against, the greater is their guilt ; and the greater any man's guilt is, the heavier will be his doom. The heathen world that lived for many ages *in darkness and the shadow of death*, shall be condemned for sinning against that imperfect knowledge of their duty, which they had from the glimmering of natural light ; but they shall be *beaten with few stripes*, their punishment shall be gentle in comparison : but what punishment can be severe enough for those obstinate infidels, that reject the *light*, and prefer *darkness* before it ; for those impudent offenders, who admit the *light* of the gospel, and yet rebel against it ; who do the works of *darkness* in the midst of this *light*, at noon day and in the face of the sun ? This consideration the scripture frequently urgeth upon those who enjoy the light of the gospel. *I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, the very worst and wickedest of the heathen, than for you.*

How

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation? If either we reject the knowledge of the truth, or sin wilfully after we have received it, that is, apostatize either to infidelity, or impiety of life, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, to consume the adversary, that is, such implacable enemies of God and his truth; in so doing we resist and reject our last remedy; and after God hath sent and sacrificed his only Son for our salvation, we cannot in reason think *there remains any more sacrifice for sin.* I have gone over the several particulars in the text, I shall only make *two* or *three* inferences.

First, if the great design of the Son of God was to enlighten the world with the knowledge of divine truth, what shall we think of those, who make it their great endeavour to stifle and suppress this light, and to hinder the free communication of it? who conceal the word of life from the people, and lock up the knowledge of salvation, contained in the holy scriptures, in an unknown tongue.

Secondly, having represented the unreasonableness of infidelity, and the evil concomitants of it in the Jews, let us take heed lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, and lest any of us fall after the same example of infidelity. Let us not reject the principles of religion, because they are inconsistent with our evil practices: but let us rather endeavour to reconcile our lives to the rules of religion, and resolve to reform those faults which religion reproveth, and which the reason of our own minds, if we would attend to it, reproveth as much as religion; a clear evidence that we are in the wrong, and religion in the right, because it hath the best and soberest reason of mankind on its side.

Let us then with all readiness of mind entertain that light which God hath afforded to us, to conduct us and shew us the way to happiness, whether by the principles of natural religion, or by the revelation of the gospel in its primitive purity and lustre, and not as it hath been muffled and disguised by the ignorance and superstition which

which prevailed in after-ages, till the light of the reformation sprang out, and restored a new day to us, and called us again out of darkness into a marvellous light; which by the blessing of God we have now enjoyed for many years, and which we cannot go about to quench, without incurring the condemnation in the text.

Thirdly and lastly, let us take heed of practical infidelity, of opposing and contradicting the christian religion by our wicked lives and actions. Though we profess to believe the gospel, yet if our *deeds be evil*, we do in effect and by interpretation reject it, and *love darkness rather than light*; though we assent to the truth of it, yet we *with-hold it in unrighteousness*, we resist the virtue and efficacy of it, and do oppose and blaspheme it by our lives; nay, we do as much as in us lies to make others atheists, by exposing religion to the contempt and scorn of such persons, and by opening their mouths against it; as either not containing the laws of a good life, or as destitute of power and efficacy to persuade men to the obedience of those laws. Where, will they say, is this excellent religion, so much boasted of? how does it appear? Look into the lives of Christians, and there you will best see the admirable effects of this doctrine, the mighty force of this institution! And what a shameful reproach is this to us! what a scandal and disparagement to our holy religion, to see some of the worst of men wearing the badge and livery of the best religion and institution that ever was in the world!

I conclude all with those words of the apostle, *Philip i. 27. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of CHRIST, and stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.*

S E R M O N CCXLVI.

The ground of bad mens enmity to
the truth.

St. JOHN iii. 20.

*For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither
cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*

AMONG all the advantages which God hath afforded mankind, to conduct them to eternal happiness, the light of the christian religion is incomparably the greatest; which makes it the greater wonder, that at its first appearing in the world, it should meet with such unkind entertainment, and so fierce and violent an opposition. Of all the blessings of nature, light is the most welcome and pleasant; and surely to the mind of man, rightly disposed, truth is as agreeable and delightful, as it is to the eye to behold the sun; and yet we find, that when the most glorious light that ever the world saw visited mankind, and truth it self was incarnate, and came down from heaven to dwell amongst us, it was so far from being welcomed by the world, that it was treated with all imaginable rudeness, and was opposed by the Jews, with as much fierceness and rage, as if an enemy had invaded their country, with a design to take away their place and nation. No sooner did the Son of God appear, and begin to send forth his light and truth among them, by the publick preaching of his doctrine, but the teachers and rulers among the Jews rose up against him as a common enemy, and were never quiet till they had taken him out of the way, and by this means, as they thought, quite extinguished that light.

Now

Now what can we imagine should be the reason of all this, that a person who gave such clear evidence that he came from God, that a doctrine which carries such clear evidence of its divine original, should be rejected with so much indignation and scorn? that light and truth, which are so agreeable to mankind, and so universally welcome, should be so disdainfully repulsed? What account can be given of it, but that which our SAVIOUR here gives in the text? *Light was come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light; because their deeds were evil. For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd, (or discovered; for so the word likewise signifies, and may very fitly be so rendered in this place) but (as it follows) he that doth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God; that is, that they are of a divine stamp and original. In which words our SAVIOUR represents to us the different disposition and carriage of good and bad men, as to the receiving or rejecting of truth, when it is offered to them: they that are wicked and worldly are enemies to truth, because they have designs contrary to it, every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. And on the contrary, a good man, he that doth the truth, and sincerely practises what he knows, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.*

I shall not need to handle these distinctly, because in speaking to one, the contrary will sufficiently appear. That therefore which I shall speak to at this time, shall be the former of these, viz. the enmity of bad men, and of those who carry on ill designs to the truth, together with the causes and reasons of it, *every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered.* Here our SAVIOUR's doctrine (as I have shewn in the three last discourses) is represented to us by the metaphor of *light*, because it was so clear a revelation of the will of God, and our duty; and carried in it so much evidence of its divinity; it being the chief property of light to discover it self, and other things:

things : so that those great and important truths contained in our SAVIOUR's doctrine, are the *light* here spoken of, and which men of bad designs and practices, are said to hate and decline ; *every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

In which words *two* things offer themselves to our consideration.

First, the enmity of wicked men to the truth : *every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light.*

Secondly, the ground or reason of this enmity, *lest his deeds should be discovered.*

First, the enmity of wicked men to the truth : *every one that doth evil, hateth the light.* Men of ill designs and practices hate the light, and because they hate it they shun it and flee from it, *neither cometh he to the light.* Now this enmity to truth appears principally in these *two* things, in their resistance, and in their persecution of it.

I. In their opposition and resistance of it. A bad man is not only averse from the entertainment of it, but thinks himself concerned to resist it. Thus the Jews opposed those divine truths, which our SAVIOUR declared to them ; they did not only refuse to receive them, but they set themselves to confute them, and by all means to blast the credit of them, and to charge them not only with novelty and imposture, but with a seditious design, and with blasphemous and odious consequences ; they perverted every thing he said to a bad sense, and put malicious constructions upon all he did, though never so blameless and innocent. When he instructed the people, they said he was stirring them up to sedition ; when he told them he was the Son of God, they made him a blasphemer for saying so ; when he healed on the sabbath-day, they charged him with profaneness ; when he confirmed his doctrine by miracles, they reported him a magician ; when they could find no fault with many parts of his doctrine, which was so holy and

and excellent, that malice it self was not able to misrepresent it, or take any exception to it, they endeavoured to destroy the credit of it, by raising scandals upon him for his life; because his conversation was free and familiar, they taxed him *for a wine-bibber, and a glutton*: and because he accompanied with bad men, in order to the reclaiming and reforming of them, they represented him as a *favourer of such persons, a friend of publicans and sinners.*

By these and such like calumnies they endeavoured to disparage his doctrine, and to alienate men from it: being prejudiced against the truth themselves, they did what they could to keep others from embracing it; and as our SAVIOUR tells us, *shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, neither going in themselves, nor suffering others that were going in, to enter.*

2. The enmity of bad men to the truth likewise appears in their persecution of it, not only in those that propound it to them, but in all those that give entertainment to it: and this is the highest expression of enmity that can be, to be satisfied with nothing less than the destruction and extirpation of what we hate. And thus the Jews declared their enmity to the gospel. When this great light came into the world, they not only shut their eyes against it, but endeavoured to extinguish it, by persecuting the author of this doctrine and all those that published it, and made profession of it: they persecuted our SAVIOUR all his life, and were continually contriving mischief against him, seeking to entrap him in his words, and so render him obnoxious to the Roman government, and at last putting him to death upon a false and forged accusation, and all this out of enmity to that truth which he delivered to them from God; as he himself tells us, *John viii. 44. But now ye seek to kill me, a man which hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God.*

But their malice did not rest here, they persecuted in like manner his disciples and followers, *casting them out of their synagogues, and forbidding them to speak to the people in the name of JESUS, delivering them up to con-*

with, and condemning them to death. Never did good men shew greater zeal and earnestness for the truth, than these wicked men did against it; so that had our blessed SAVIOUR been the greatest impostor that ever was, and brought the most pernicious doctrine that ever was into the world, they could not have persecuted him with more rage and fury, and given greater testimony of their enmity against it. I pass to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, to enquire into the causes and reasons of this enmity: *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered.* Here is the bottom of mens malice and enmity against the truth, it lays open their evil deeds and designs: men of honest intentions are not afraid of the light, because it can do them no prejudice; it shews what they ought to do, and they have a desire to know it, that they may do it: *He that loveth the truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.* Light is an advantage to good and virtuous actions, which the more they are seen and understood, the more they are approved and esteemed; but they that do evil, love darkness rather than light, because they are afraid their deeds should be discovered.

And there is a twofold discovery of their actions, which bad men are afraid of. They are afraid they should be discovered to themselves, because that creates trouble and uneasiness to them; and they are afraid they should be discovered to others, because that causeth shame.

i. They are afraid the evil of their actions should be discovered to themselves, because that creates guilt and trouble; men do not care to see their own faults, and have the vileness of their deeds truly represented to them. And this no doubt was the principal reason which set the scribes and pharisees so much against our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, because it discovered their hypocrisy to them; and how beautiful soever they appeared without, in their affected piety and formal devotion, yet like painted sepulchres, they were within full of uncleanness and rottenness. Those real virtues which

our SAVIOUR taught, and the practice whereof he made so necessary to the eternal happiness and salvation of men, were a severe reproof of their lives and actions, and did discover to them how defective they were in that righteousness, which alone will bring men to the kingdom of God: so that his doctrine must needs be very troublesome to them, and they did not care to hear it, no more than a bad face loves to look in a true glass; they had flattered themselves before, in a conceit of their own righteousness, but when the light came, it discovered all their spots and deformities, so that they were no longer able to hide them from themselves; and this was a double trouble to them.

(1.) It robbed them of that good opinion which they had of themselves before; and it is no small vexation to a man to be put out of conceit with himself. Truth flatters no man, and therefore it is no wonder that so many are offended at it; a good man is satisfied with himself, and so would bad men fain be too; and therefore truth must needs be very unwelcome to them, because it attempts to deprive them of so great a satisfaction, and to chase away one of the most pleasant delusions in the world.

(2.) The discovery of mens faults fills them with trouble and guilt. Truth carries great evidence along with it, and is very convincing, and where men will not yield to it, and suffer themselves to be convinced by it, it gives them a great deal of disturbance, *gravis malæ conscientie lux est*; says Seneca; *light is very troublesome to a bad conscience*, for it shews men their deformities whether they will or no; and when mens vices are discovered to them, they must either resolve to persist in them, or to break them off, and either of these is very grievous.

Some men are so habituated to their vices, and so strongly addicted to them by their inclination, and attached to them by their interest, that they cannot quit them without offering the greatest violence to themselves; it is like *cutting off a right hand, or pulling out a right eye*, as our SAVIOUR expresses it. Now to avoid

this pain and trouble, most men, though they be convinced of their faults, chuse to continue in them, and yet this is full as troublesome as the other, though it is hard to convince men of it; there cannot be a more restless state than that of guilt, the stings and torments whereof are continually increased by mens practising contrary to the convictions of their own minds. Perhaps the trouble of repentance and reformation may be as great at first; but all this pain is in order to a cure, and ends in health and ease: but he who goes on in a bad course, after he is convinced of the evil of it, lays a foundation of perpetual anguish and torment, which, the longer he continues in his vices, will perpetually increase; so that it is no wonder if *they that do evil, hate the light*, when it is every way so grievous and uneasy to them.

2. Bad men are enemies to the truth, because it discovers the evil of their actions to others, which causeth shame. The doctrine of the gospel lays open the faults of men, and upbraids them with their vices. Precepts of holiness and virtue, are a publick reproof to the corrupt manners of mankind; and men hate publick reproof, because it shames them before others, and exposeth them to censure and contempt. This made the pharisees so offended with our SAVIOUR's doctrine, because it was so severe a censure of their manners, and abated the reputation of their sanctity and devotion; it discovered them at the bottom to be very bad men; and how *righteous* soever they appeared *outwardly*, to be *inwardly full of hypocrisy and iniquity*. Now reputation is a tender part, which few men can endure to have touched, though never so justly; and therefore no wonder if bad men be impatient of that truth which lays them open to the world, and do by all means endeavour to suppress and conceal it from themselves and others. Thus I have as briefly as I could, given you an account of the true ground and reason of the enmity of wicked men against the truth, because it discovers their errors and faults, both to themselves and others.

I shall now only draw *two or three* inferences from this discourse, by way of application, and so conclude.

I. From hence we may learn the true reason why men are so apt to reject and oppose the principles of religion, both of natural and revealed religion. By the principles of natural religion, I mean those which nature acquaints us with, as the being of God and his providence, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments after this life : by the principles of revealed religion, those which are revealed in the holy scriptures, especially in the gospel, which is the clearest and most perfect revelation of the divine will, that God ever made to the world. Now the reason why men oppose these principles, and endeavour to throw them off, is because they are loth to be under the restraint of them ; they are so many checks and fetters to men of ill designs, and bad lives ; and therefore no wonder if they bite at them, and endeavour to break them off ; they contradict the lusts of men, and fly in their faces when they do wickedly ; they are continually pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, and therefore they would fain be rid of them ; and therefore there is a plain reason why these men oppose the truth, and endeavour to baffle it ; because it opposeth and affronts them in those wicked practices, in which they are resolved to continue. I do not say that all bad men fly thus high, as to endeavour to extinguish the belief of religion in themselves and others ; but there are *three* sorts of men more especially, that think themselves concerned to promote atheism either in themselves or others.

1. Those who are more enormously wicked, are concerned to be atheists themselves, because the principles of religion are so plainly inconsistent with their practice. This is so visible, that they cannot but see it ; and therefore they must declare themselves enemies to such principles, as are so notoriously contrary to the course they live in.

2. Those who, though their lives are not so notoriously bad, have quicker understandings than the common sort of sinners ; because these do sooner discern the inconsistency of these principles with their own actions ; and being resolved not to reform, partly for the peace

of their own minds, and partly to vindicate themselves to others, they declare war against these principles ; and if they can overthrow them, they gain a double advantage by it. They think they shall be at more ease in their own minds, if they can but free themselves from the check and control of these principles ; and indeed they would be so, if they could root them out : but nature hath planted them so deep, and riveted them so fast, that when we have done all we can to extirpate them, they will spring up again. And then they hope also by this means to vindicate themselves to others, because they can now no longer be upbraided with the disagreement of their principles with their practice.

3. There are others, though they be not atheists themselves, yet from the spirit and interest of a worldly church, are concerned to promote atheism in others. And this hath been a very common practice of the factors for the church of Rome in this age ; when they cannot gain men directly to their religion, they fetch a strange compass, and try to make them infidels, or scepticks, as to all religion ; and then they doubt not to bring them about at last to the outward profession of their religion, which will serve their turn well enough : for when men are once unhinged from the principles of all religion, it is no hard matter for their own ease and interest to persuade them to an outward compliance with that religion which is coming in fashion, and will bring them some advantage. And this is not an uncharitable suspicion, but certain in fact and experience ; that this impious method of several of the priests of the church of Rome, hath been one of the principal sources of the infidelity and scepticism of this age.

II. This is a great vindication of our religion, that it can bear the light, and is ready to submit it self to any impartial trial and examination : we are not afraid to expose our religion to the publick view of the world, and to appeal to the judgment of mankind for the truth and reasonableness of it : truth loves to come abroad and be seen, being confident of her own native

beauty

beauty and charms, of her own force and power to gain upon the minds of men : and on the contrary, it doth justly draw a great suspicion upon any religion, if it declines the light ; and nothing can render it more suspected, than for the teachers of it to make it their great care to keep people in the dark about it ; or if they chance to peep into it, and to espy the defects of it, to awe them by the extremity of danger and suffering, from declaring against those errors and corruptions which they have discovered in it. I do not know two worse signs of the falshood and corruption of any church or religion, than *ignorance* and an *inquisition* : these two are shrewder marks of a false church, than all the fifteen marks which Bellarmine hath mustered up are, to prove the church of Rome to be the only true christian church. Methinks their church and ours differ like Egypt and Goshen, in the time of the plague of darkness ; only in this they differ from Egypt, that God sent the plague among them, but the church of Rome affects it, and brings it upon themselves ; a darkness so gross that *it may be felt* ; and to make it more thick and palpable, they impose upon men the belief of direct *nonsense*, under the grave venerable pretence of *mystery*, as in their doctrine of *transubstantiation* : and the great design of the *inquisition*, is to awe men from reading the scriptures, and from searching into, and examining the grounds of their religion, because they think they will not bear the test. *This is the condemnation of that church, that when light is come into the world, they love darkness rather than light, because their doctrines and their deeds are evil.*

III. And *lastly*, this gives us the plain reason why some in the world are so careful to suppress and conceal the truth, and to lock up the knowledge of it from the people in an unknown tongue, and do so jealously guard all the avenues whereby light and knowledge should enter into them, is because their doctrines and designs, *and deeds are evil*, and they are afraid they should be discovered to be so. This is the true reason why *they love darkness rather than light* ; for the church of Rome are *wise enough in their generation*, to understand that nothing but the darkness

darkness of their shops, can hinder people from discerning the falseness of their wares ; they have several things to put off to the people, which cannot bear the trial of a clear and full light. What else makes them conceal the word of God from men ? that *great light* which God hath set up in the world, *to be a lamp to our feet, and a lanthorn to our steps* ; it is not to keep out *heresy*, but *light* and *truth* : when they cannot be ignorant that God hath set up this *candle* on purpose *to enlighten the world*, why do they *put it under a bushel* ? but that they are guilty to themselves, that several of their doctrines and practices will be discovered and reproved by it.

What makes them in the face of the world to conceal from the people the second commandment in their ordinary catechisms and manuals, but lest the people should come to understand that God hath expressly forbidden the worship of images ? We do not conceal those texts, *feeding sheep*, and *upon this rock will I build my church* ; for fear the people should discern the Pope's supremacy and infallibility in them, but are content to run the hazard of it, and let them find them there if they can.

And then why do they mask the publick service of God, and the prayers and devotions of the people in an unknown tongue, but that they are afraid they should understand the gross superstitions and idolatry of many of them ? If they mean honestly, why do they cast such a mist about their religion ? why do they wrap and cover it all over in darkness, but that they are heartily afraid, that the more people understand it, the worse they will like it ?

The truth is, their doctrines are evil, and *their deeds are evil*, and plainly condemned almost in every page of the bible ; and therefore it is a dangerous book to be suffered in the hands of the people ; and there is hardly any thing which the church of Rome contends against, with more stiffness and zeal, than letting the people have the service of God, and the holy scriptures in a known tongue. When the office of the mass was not many years since, by some bishops and others in *France*, translated into the vulgar tongue, for the benefit of the people,

people, how did the then Pope Alexander the VII. thunder against them for it, calling them that did it *sons of perdition*, and condemning the thing as if it had been the wickedest thing in the world, and had directly tended to the overthrow of the christian religion?

And then for the use of the holy scriptures in the vulgar tongue, they have put that under so many locks and keys, that the greatest caution in the world is used in the permission and allowance of it to any particular person; the priest hath not power to do it, it is only the bishops that can grant this liberty; and they do it very rarely, and only to those of whom they are very secure, and this power since that time again revoked; so that the gospel, which before our SAVIOUR'S appearance was *a mystery, hid from ages and generations*, continues so still to the common people in the church of Rome, and is under a thicker *veil*, more muffled and hid from the people, in an unknown tongue, than it was to the Jews, under the obscure prophecies, and dark types and shadows of the old testament. So that though CHRIST be *read in their churches every day*, as Moses was to the Jews *in their synagogues*, yet he hath *a veil upon his face* as Moses had. *Wo unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, for ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men, and neither enter in yourselves, nor suffer those that would enter, to go in.* The people of the church of Rome are indeed to be pitied, who are kept in ignorance against their wills; but the governing part of that church are without excuse, who to cover their errors and corruptions, hide the scriptures from the people, *love darkness rather than light*; *this therefore is their great condemnation.*

Witness the black and hellish design of this day*, such as never before entred into the heart of man, to have ruined a whole kingdom at once, in its prince and representative; and by a cruel sudden blow, to have taken away the lives of the greatest and most considerable assembly in the world. They must needs *love darkness and hate the light*, who have such designs to carry on, and

* Preached Nov. 5. 1684.

such

such *deeds of darkness* to justify and make good ; they had need to suppress, and if possibly they can, to extinguish, not only that revealed truth of *God*, but even the great principles of natural religion, the belief of a *God*, and a judgment to come, that attempt such things.

Time was, when in despite of the clearest evidence in the world, they did confidently deny that any such design was laid by those of their religion, but that it was a contrivance of some minister of state, who drew in a few rash and hot-headed persons of desperate fortunes into it, and then betrayed and discovered them : but when the late *popish* plot broke out here, then they were contented to own the gun-powder-treason, because they that were executed for it, did confess it, that they might with a better colour* bring themselves off from this, which was so constantly denied by those who were condemned and executed for it ; but this was but a shift and artifice to blind the clear evidence of this latter conspiracy, which prest so hard upon them : and since that, because they are afraid it is still believed, they have used all imaginable arts, and taken a great deal of pains to wash this black-a-moor ; yet the *negro* is a *negro* still, and I doubt not, but they are still at work, carrying on the same design, which if *God* do not mercifully frustrate and disappoint, is like at last to involve this nation in great misery and confusion.

But the LORD reigneth, therefore let the earth rejoice, and the multitude of the isles be glad thereof. He that sitteth in the heavens laughs at them, the LORD shall have them in derision. There are many plots and devices in the heart of man : but the counsel of the *LORD* that shall stand. And if we would but live up to the light which we enjoy, and adorn our reformed religion by an holy and unblameable conversation ; if we would avoid those bloody and rebellious ways, which are so natural and suitable to their religion, and so contrary to ours, and so scandalous to all religion ; if we would break off our sins by repentance, and put an end to our foolish differences and divisions, by returning to the ancient peace and unity of this once happy and firmly compacted church,

church, we have no reason yet to despair, but that God would *return to us in mercy and loving-kindness*, and *think thoughts of peace towards us*, and preserve the best religion in the world to us, and our posterity after us.

Now unto him that hath delivered us so often, and so wonderfully, and doth deliver us, and we trust will still deliver us, to him be honour and glory, praise and thanksgiving, for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N CCXLVII.

True liberty, the result of christianity.

St. JOHN viii. 36.

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

THE meaning of these words will best appear, by considering the occasion of them, which was this. Upon our SAVIOUR's preaching to the Jews, many believed on him; whereupon he tells them, that *they continued in his doctrine*, did not only yield a present assent, but firmly embraced it, and framed their life and practice according to it, then *they would be his disciples indeed, and they should know the truth*; they would come by degrees to a more perfect knowledge and understanding of it, *and the truth would make them free*. At this expression of *being made free*, they were somewhat offended; because they took themselves to be the free people in the world: and by virtue of God's covenant with Abraham, from whom they were descended to have many privileges and immunities conferred upon them, above the rest of mankind, *ver. 33. They answered*

and him, *we be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man : how sayest thou, ye shall be made free ?* They took this for a great affront to them, and an insinuation that they were in slavery and bondage. But they mistook our SAVIOUR, who did not speak of an outward and civil servitude ; and yet, if their pride and conceit of themselves would have suffered them to consider it, it was true likewise in that sense, that they had lost their liberty, being at that time in great bondage and subjection to the Romans. But that was not the thing our SAVIOUR meant ; he spake of a spiritual servitude, which if men were truly sensible of, is far more grievous than that of the body, and the outward man : *ver. 34, 35. Jesus answered them, verily verily I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever : but the son abideth for ever ;* that is, a servant hath no right to any thing, but is perfectly at the disposal of his master, being a part of his goods, which he may use as he pleaseth ; but the son hath a right to the inheritance, and is as it were lord of the estate ; and then it follows, *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

In which words our SAVIOUR seems to allude to a custom which was in some of the cities of Greece, and perhaps in other places, whereby the son and heir had a power to adopt brethren, and to give them the liberty and privilege of the family. If the Son of God set you free from this spiritual slavery, and adopt you to be his brethren, *then are you free indeed* ; not only in a vain opinion and conceit, as you take yourselves to be by virtue of being Abraham's children ; but really and in truth ; ye shall be asserted to a truer and more excellent kind of liberty, than that which ye value your selves so much upon by virtue of being Abraham's seed. *Then shall ye be free indeed.*

So that our SAVIOUR's meaning is plainly this ; that the doctrine of the christian religion, which the Son of God came to preach to the world, heartily embraced, does assert men to the truest and most perfect kind of liberty.

liberty. I know this is but a metaphor whereby the benefits and advantages which the doctrine of God our SAVIOUR hath brought to mankind, are exprest and set forth to us ; but it is a very easy and fit metaphor, and does convey the thing intended very fully to our minds, and hath a great deal of truth and reality under it. And to the end we may understand it the better, I shall do these *two* things.

First, observe to you in the general, that the spirit of God, in the holy scriptures, delights very much to set forth to us the benefits and advantages of the christian religion, by metaphors taken from such things as are most pleasant and desireable to men.

Secondly, I shall shew particularly in what respects the Son of God by his doctrine makes us free. For when *the Son* is said to *make us free*, we are to understand that it is by his doctrine ; for that our SAVIOUR had expressly said before, *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

First, I shall observe to you in the general, that the spirit of God, in the holy scriptures, delights very much to set forth to us the benefits and advantages of the christian religion, by metaphors taken from such things as are most pleasant and desireable to men ; more especially by these *three*, of *light*, *life*, and *liberty*, than which nothing can be named that is more delightful and valuable to men.

By *light* ; of which Solomon says that *it is sweet, and a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun.* Hence our SAVIOUR is called *the Sun of righteousness*, Mal. iv. 2. and *the light of the world.* And ver. 12. of this chapter, *I am the light of the world ; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.* And chap. i. 9. he is called *the true light ; that was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world ;* or, as the words should rather be translated, *which coming into the world lighteth every man.* He is said to *give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death*, Luke vii. 39. *To be a light to lighten the nations*, Luke ii. 32. And the doctrine which he preached is called *a light*, John i.

19. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.* And 2 Cor. iv. 6. the gospel is called *the light of the knowledge of the glory of GOD, in the face of JESUS CHRIST.*

So likewise by the metaphor of *life*; which is that which men value above all other things. *John xi. 25. I am the resurrection and the life.* And *John xiv. 6. I am the way, the truth, and the life.* And because bread is the chief support of life, our SAVIOUR is likewise set forth to us under that notion, *John vi. 32. For the bread of GOD is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.* And we are said to *have life through his name*, *John xx. 31. But these are written, that ye might believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the Son of GOD, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.* And the doctrine of the gospel is likewise called *the word of life*, *Phil. ii. 16.*

And to come to my present purpose, the benefits and advantages of the gospel are frequently represented to us under the notion of *liberty* and *redemption* from slavery and bondage, which among men is valued next to life itself. Hence are those titles given to our SAVIOUR, of *redeemer*, and *deliverer*; and he is said to have *obtained eternal redemption for us*, *Heb. ix. 12.* He is said to have *given himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity*, *Tit. ii. 14.* And the publishing of the gospel is compared to the proclaiming of the year of *jubilee* among the Jews, wherein all persons were set at liberty, *Isa. lxi. 2. The spirit of the LORD GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.* Upon this account likewise the gospel is called by St. James, *the royal law, and the perfect law of liberty*, *James i. 25.*

Thus you see that this is one of the principal metaphors whereby the scripture sets forth to us the advantages of the christian doctrine, and that it is not seldom and casually used, but frequently, and upon design,

as that which most fitly represents to us the benefits we have by the gospel.

Secondly, I shall now in the next place shew more particularly, in what respects the Son of GOD by his doctrine, may be said to *make us free*. And that in these *two* respects.

I. As it frees us from the bondage of ignorance, and error, and prejudice.

II. From the slavery of our lusts and passions.

I. It frees us from the bondage of ignorance, and error, and prejudice, which is a more inveterate and obstinate error. And this is a great bondage to the mind of man, to live in ignorance of those things which are useful for us to know ; to be mistaken about those matters which are of great moment and concernment to us to be rightly informed in : ignorance is the confinement of our understandings, as knowledge and right apprehensions of things are a kind of liberty and enlargement to the mind of man. Under this slavery the world groaned, and were *bound in these chains of darkness* for many years, till the *light of the glorious gospel* broke in upon the world, and our blessed SAVIOUR, who is *truth*, came to set us free.

As for the heathen part of the world, the generality of them lived in gross ignorance of GOD, and pernicious mistakes concerning him. So the apostle tells us, *Rom. i. 21.* that *they were vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened* : And, *Eph. iv. 17, 18.* that *they walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of GOD, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart*. They had gross and unworthy, and false apprehensions concerning the nature of GOD, by which they were misled into horrible superstitions, and abominable idolatries : and in conformity to the false notions which they had of their deities, and in imitation of their fabulous stories concerning them, they were guilty of all manner of lewdness and vice ; so that through their mistakes of GOD, they were altogether estranged from that virtuous, and divine life, which men ought

to lead : and considering what apprehensions they had of God, many of their superstitions and vices were almost unavoidable. And by this advantage of the ignorance that mankind was sunk into, the devil did chiefly maintain and keep up his kingdom ; it being next to impossible for men amidst so much darkness to see the right way, and walk in it. It was easy for him, when he had thus enslaved their understandings, and blinded their eyes, *to lead them captive at his pleasure.*

Yea the Jews themselves, though they enjoyed many degrees of light beyond the rest of the world, and had the advantage of frequent revelations, yet this was but darkness, in comparison of those clear discoveries which were made to mankind by the gospel ; by which many things are revealed to us, which were *hid from ages and generations* ; and one of the most important truths, and of greatest efficacy upon the minds of men is brought to light, viz. the certainty of a future state, and the rewards of it. This the apostle tells us is *made manifest by the appearing of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*, 2 Tim. i. 10. Under the dispensation of the law, the Jews had very imperfect notions concerning the divine nature, and the best and most acceptable way of worshipping God, which they thought to consist in external rites, and carnal observances, in washing of the body, and in sacrifices of lambs and goats, and other creatures ; for which reason, the law is frequently represented in the new testament, as a state of bondage and restraint. It is called *a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear* ; a *school-master* which kept men under a severe awe and discipline. It is represented as a prison, and a condition of restraint, Gal. iii. 23. *Before faith came*, that is, before the gospel was revealed, *we were kept under the law, shut up*. Upon the same account the temper and disposition of men under that dispensation, is called *a spirit of bondage* ; *ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*, Rom. viii. 15. that is, ye are not still under the law. And on the contrary, the gospel is represented as a state of *liberty*

and *adoption*, whereby men are freed from the bondage they were in under the law : so that there was great need in reference to the Jews, as well as the heathen world, of a clearer light, and more perfect revelation, to free the minds of men from the servitude of ignorance and error.

And this was a bondage indeed, worse than that of *Egypt* or *Babylon*, because they were in love with this slavery, and fond of their fetters ; and when *light came into the world, they loved darkness rather than light*. So that it was one of the hardest things in the world to convince them of their ignorance, and to make them patient of instruction, and willing to be set free from those violent and unreasonable prejudices against our SAVIOUR and his doctrine, which they were possess withal ; inasmuch that the apostles found it an easier work to gain the heathen world, than the Jews. For though the heathens had less knowledge, yet their pride and prejudice was not so great ; they were in a thicker darkness than the Jews ; but when the light came, they were more willing to entertain it, and did not shut their eyes so wilfully against it ; when the prison doors were open, they were glad to come out, and accept of liberty : but the Jews were so obstinately fixt in their prejudice, that they would not let *the truth set them free*. When this *jubilee*, this *acceptable year of the LORD* was proclaimed, they refused the benefit of it ; and like those who were of a servile disposition among them, they were contented to have *their ears bored through, and to be servants for ever*.

But yet it was a great liberty which the gospel offered to them, had they been sensible of it. For how easy is the mind of man, when it finds it self freed from those errors and prejudices, which it sees others labour under ? and does it rejoice in this liberty ? Certainly one of the greatest pleasures of human nature is the discovery of truth, yea even in curious speculations, which are of no great concernment to us. How was Archimedes transported upon a mathematical discovery, so that he thought no sacrifice too great to offer to the gods by way of acknowledgment ?

knowledgment ? But surely the pleasure is justly greater in matters of so great moment and consequence to our happiness. The light of the sun is not more grateful to our outward sense, than the light of truth is to the soul. By ignorance, and error, and prejudice, the mind of man is fettered and entangled, so that it hath not the free use of it self: but when we are rightly informed, especially in those things which are useful and necessary for us to know, we recover our liberty, and feel our selves enlarged from the restraints we were in before. And this effect the saving truths of the gospel have upon the minds of men, above any discoveries that ever were made to the world. Christianity hath set the world free from those chains of darkness and ignorance it was bound withal, and from the most dangerous and pernicious errors, and that in matters of greatest consequence and importance. This is the *first* kind of freedom, which we have by the doctrine of the gospel, freedom from the bondage of ignorance, error and prejudice, in matters of greatest moment and importance to our happiness. And though this liberty be highly to be valued ; yet the other, which I am going to speak to, is more considerable, and that is,

II. Freedom from the slavery of our passions and lusts, from the tyranny of vicious habits and practices. And this, which is the saddest and worst kind of bondage, the doctrine of the gospel is a most proper and powerful means to free us from ; and this is that which I suppose is principally intended by our SAVIOUR. For when the Jews told him that they did not stand in need of any liberty, that *they were Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any*, our SAVIOUR declares what kind of bondage and slavery he meant ; *he that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* Wickedness and vice is the bondage of the will, which is the proper seat of liberty : and therefore there is no such slave in the world, as a man that is subject to his lusts ; that is, under the tyranny of strong and unruly passions, of vicious inclinations and habits. This man is a slave to many masters, who are very imperious and exacting ; and the more he yieldeth to them, with

the greater tyranny and rigour they will use him. One passion hurries a man one way, and another drives him fiercely another ; one lust commands him upon such a service, and another calls him off to another work ; so that a man under the command and authority of his lusts and passions, is like the Centurion's servants, when *they say to him come, he must come* ; and when *they say go, he must go* ; when *they say do this, he must do it* ; because he is in subjection to them.

How does a man lose the power over himself by any inordinate passions ? how do anger and revenge hurry a man into rash and mischievous actions, which he repents of commonly as soon as they are done ? how do malice and envy torment the mind, and keep it in continual labour and uneasiness ? what a slave and drudge is he, who is possess'd with any inordinate love for the world, and desire of riches ? how does the tyranny of ambition thrust men upon dangers, and torment them with disappointment ? what a bondage is it to be under the slavish fear of death ? and how does every lust and vicious habit domineer over a man ? so that though he desire, and many times resolve to do otherwise, yet he is not able to assert his own liberty, and resist the weakest temptations when they come in his way.

And that which makes their condition the worse, is, that every man is wholly at first, and afterwards in some degree consenting to his own bondage. In other cases most men are made slaves against their wills, by the force and power of others : but the wicked man chuseth this condition, and voluntarily submits himself to it. There are very few to be found in the world, that are so stupid and senseless, so sick of their liberty, and so weary of their happiness, as to put themselves into this condition : but the wicked *sells himself to do wickedly*, and parts with that liberty which he may keep ; and if he would resolve to do it, and beg God's grace to that purpose, none could take it from him.

And which is an aggravation of his servile condition, he makes himself a slave to his own servants, to those that were born to be subject to him, his own appetites,

and inclinations and passions. So that this is the worst kind of slavery, so much worse than that of the mines and gallies, as the soul and spirit of a man is more noble and excellent than his body.

Now the doctrine of the gospel is the most proper and effectual means in the world to free us from this servitude ; by presenting us with motives and arguments to rescue our selves from this slavery, and conferring upon us strength and assistance to that end. The doctrine of our SAVIOUR represents to us all those considerations which may convince us of the miserable bondage of those who are under the power and dominion of sin, and of the fatal inconvenience of continuing in that state ; that *the end of these things* will be death : and to encourage us to vindicate our own liberty, offers us the grace and assistance of God's holy spirit, to help our weakness, and to strengthen our holy resolutions, and to carry us through those difficulties which of our selves we are not able to conquer. The Son of God stands by us in this conflict, and *the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead*, works in us ; and if we would make use of this strength which is offered to us, we may *break these bonds in sunder, and cast these cords from us : for greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world* ; the spirit of God is stronger than *that spirit which works in the children of disobedience*. So that there is nothing wanting to set us at liberty, but the resolution of our own wills. If we will *quit our selves like men*, the power of God and his grace is ready to take our part against all our enemies. *The Son of God was manifest for this end, to take away sin, and to destroy the works of the devil ; to redeem us from all iniquity, and to deliver us from the powers of darkness* : and why should we despair of victory and success, when *the captain of our salvation, who hath led captivity captive*, leads us on, and as an encouragement to us, shews us his own triumphs and conquests which he hath made over sin and hell ? Are we enslaved to the world, and the lusts of it ? he hath *overcome the world* ; and by *faith* we may overcome it ; that is, by a firm
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firm belief and perswasion of those things which he hath revealed to us ; *for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.* Does the fear of sufferings, and persecution, and death, keep us in bondage ? The Son of GOD hath rescued us from this fear, by setting before us the glorious hopes of an eternal life. For nothing makes men afraid of death, but the want of assurance of another life, and of the happiness of it : but this our SAVIOUR hath brought to light by the gospel. By his own death and resurrection he hath given us perfect assurance of life after death, and a blessed immortality. And this, the apostle tells us, was one great reason why the Son of GOD took our mortal nature upon him, that he might conquer death for us, and free us from the slavish fear of it, *Heb. ii. 14, 15. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ; and deliver them, who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.* The inferences from this discourse, shall be these two.

First, to shew us what that liberty is which the Son of GOD confers upon us. It is not a liberty to sin ; for that our SAVIOUR tells us, is a state of slavery and bondage ; *he that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* This use indeed some made of the christian doctrine, to encourage themselves in sin, under the pretence of christian liberty, and that in the apostles days. So St. Peter tells us, *2 Eph. ii. 19. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption,* and in bondage to their lusts. But nothing can be more directly contrary to the great design and intention of the gospel, which indeed promiseth and declares liberty ; but not from the laws of GOD, and the obligation of our duty, but as the apostle calls it, *from the law of sin and death.* Christian liberty does not consist in being free from our duty, but in doing those things which really tend to our perfection and happiness, in being *free from sin, and becoming the servants of GOD.* This is the proper use and exercise of our liberty, to do what we ought, to live according to reason

reason and the laws of GOD, which are *holy, just, and good*. The freedom which the Son of GOD designed, was our being rescued from the bondage of sin and corruption, of the devil and our own lusts, *that being delivered from the hands of these enemies, we might serve GOD without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.*

Secondly, to persuade us to assert our liberty, *and stand fast in it*. The Son of GOD hath done that which is sufficient on his part to vindicate mankind from the slavery of their lusts and passions : and if we will vigorously set about the work, and put forth our endeavours, we may rescue our selves from this bondage. And because it must be acknowledged that this is no easy work, therefore by way of direction and encouragement, I would commend to men these following particulars.

1. To consider seriously the misery and danger of this condition, and the necessity of freeing our selves from this slavery. I have shewn that it is the worst kind of bondage, and it hath the saddest consequences. Some service, though it be hard and grievous, yet men are content to endure it, because it may prove beneficial to them, and is in order to a greater freedom ; but the service of sin is altogether unprofitable. *What fruit had ye then, says the apostle, in those things whereof ye are now ashamed ? for the end of those things is death. The wages of sin is death.* All the reward that shall be given us for this service, is misery and punishment, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul that doeth evil.* So that it is necessary that we should shake off this yoke, as we desire to escape the chains of darkness, and the unspeakable and insupportable misery of another world. He that now makes us his slaves to do his work, will torment us for the doing of it to all eternity.

2. Seeing this condition is so insupportable, and the consequences of it so dreadful, let us take up a firm and manly resolution to free our selves from this slavery. It is no easy matter to break off a vicious habit, which we have been long accustomed to ; nay perhaps it is one of the most difficult things that human nature can attempt, and

and therefore it requires great firmness of mind, and strength of resolution. It is next to the going against nature, and the conquering of *that*; for custom is a sort of nature, and every habit is a bowing of nature a certain way, and when nature hath once long stood bent one way, it is hard to restore it to its former condition; and nothing but a great resolution, taken up upon a full conviction of the necessity of the thing, will carry us through.

3. For the encouragement of this resolution, consider what assistance God hath promised us. Indeed when we consider the difficulty of the thing, and the weakness and unsteadfastness of our own minds, how apt we are to give over when we meet with great opposition and resistance, we might justly be discouraged in our attempts, if we had nothing but our own strength to trust to: but God hath promised to stand by us, and second us in the conflict; and if he be for us, what can stand against us? there is nothing too hard for a stout resolution backed by the grace of God.

4. That we may not be discouraged by an apprehension of too much difficulty in the thing, consider that the main difficulty is at first. So soon as we have resolution begun, the work is half done; if we can but sustain the first brunt, the enemy will give ground apace; every day we shall get more strength, and the habits of sin will be weakened. In all cases there is difficulty in breaking off a habit, and doing contrary to what we have been used and accustomed to do: but after we have practised the contrary a while, it will every day grow more easy and pleasant; for custom will make any thing so.

5. Consider that the longer we continue in this state the harder we shall find it to rescue our selves from it; for sin will every day get more strength, and we shall have less; for vice is so far from being mortified by age that by every day's continuance in it we increase the power of it; and so much strength as any one adds to his disease, he takes from himself. And this is a double weakening of us, when we do not only lose our strength

ut the enemy gets it, and will employ it against us. Therefore let us presently set about this work, *to day, while it is called to day, lest we be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* The longer we continue in sin, the further God withdraws his grace from us ; and not only so, but the devil gets a greater dominion over us, and a firmer possession of us, till by degrees we do insensibly slide into that state, in which, without a miraculous grace of God, we are like for ever to continue. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? Can may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* It is next to a natural impossibility for a man to rescue himself out of this state.

6. And lastly, be not discouraged, though ye do not meet with that success at first, which ye expected and hoped for ; though after several attempts to recover your liberty, ye be foiled and cast back. It sometimes so happens that some are by a mighty resolution, and very extraordinary and overpowering degree of God's grace, reclaimed from a wicked life at once : but in the ordinary methods of God's grace, evil habits are mastered and subdued by degrees ; and though we be resolved upon a better course, and entered upon it, yet the inclinations of our former course will frequently return upon us, and may sometimes too prevail. And we are not to think this strange : it is nothing but what is natural, and may reasonably be expected. It is no just ground of discouragement to us, if after we have engaged in a good course, we be sometimes pulled back again, and the habits which we are breaking off from, gather strength, and take head again ; as an enemy after he is routed, and hath begun to fly, does frequently rally, and make as if he would renew the fight again, and may perhaps prevail in a little skirmish : but for all this, we are nevertheless in a fair way to victory, if we will pursue our first advantage, and prosecute it vigorously. Nay, this should be so far from discouraging us, that it should make us receive new courage, that we may not lose what we have

I the rather mention this, because many miscarry upon this account, and many good resolutions and attempts to vindicate our liberty from the bondage of corruption, are given over and come to nothing, because men make false accounts of things, and expect to conquer and get a complete victory at first: and indeed they are taught by those who are not well skilled in this spiritual warfare, that this work is done in an instant, and the habits of grace and virtue are infused into men at once; and if men give back, all they had done is lost, and that they are in a worse condition, than if they had never begun: whereas usually it is quite otherwise, and the habits of goodness are acquired, as other habits are, by slow degrees at first, and with a great deal of conflict: and it is a good while before a man comes to that confirmed state, that he may be said to *have conquered*: but if he persists in his resolutions, and when he hath received some foil take heart again, he is in the way to victory; and though he be not in a perfect state of acceptance with God, yet his endeavours have the acceptance of good beginnings, and he hath no reason to be discouraged at what he had reason to expect when he began this work, if he calculate things aright: and they that tell men otherwise, have taken up false notions in divinity, but do not consult human nature, and the usual progress of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner, and reclaiming him from a wicked course, and have not taken sufficient care to reconcile their notions of divinity, with the nature of things, and the certain and undoubted experience of mankind. Therefore let no man be faint and discouraged upon this account, and think the thing is not to be done, because he doth not meet with perfect success at first; for this seldom happens, and therefore ought not to be expected: but let him still go on and reinforce his resolutions; and the opposition and difficulty will abate, and the work continually grow easier upon his hand, and the God of peace will at last tread down Satan under his feet.

S E R M O N CCXLVIII.

The duty of improving the present opportunity and advantages of the gospel.

St. J O H N xii. 35.

Then said JESUS unto them, yet a little while is the light with you ; walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you.

Preached Feb. 15. 1685.

THEN said JESUS unto them, that is, upon the discourse he had just before had with them, concerning his approaching death, and departure out of this world ; at the mention whereof, they were offended and troubled ; but instead of that, our SAVIOUR puts them upon that which would be of real use and benefit to them, to improve those advantages and opportunities, which they were like to enjoy but a little while ; *Then said JESUS unto them, yet a little while is the light with you ; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you ; for he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth.*

Yet a little while is the light with you. This our SAVIOUR speaks of himself, and his personal presence and teaching among them ; *yet a little while is the light with you* : for so he frequently calls himself and his doctrine. *John iii. 19. Light is come into the world. John viii. 12. I am the light of the world : he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life ; that is, such a light as will direct him in the way to eternal life ; and John ix. 5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

Walk while ye have the light. Light is the opportunity of action, and going about our business, and therefore it is joined with *walking* and *working*, as in the text I mentioned before, *I am the light of the world: He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.* And *John ix. 4.* where the continuance of this opportunity of light is called *the day*, and the ceasing or withdrawing of it, *the night*: *I must work the works of him that sent me,* says our LORD, *while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.* Therefore we should *walk* and *work* while we have the light.

Let darkness come upon you. And this will be a dismal and fatal time, when all opportunity of *walking* and *working* will be at an end; for when the *light* hath left us, we shall not be able to see what to do, or whither to go, as our SAVIOUR adds to enforce his exhortation of making use of the present advantages and opportunities. *Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.*

All this our SAVIOUR plainly speaks to the Jews, with relation to his own personal presence and preaching among them, which he tells them would shortly cease, and be at an end. In which sense these words do not concern us, but only the Jews at that time, to whom they were spoken; but by an equality of reason, the advice here given by our SAVIOUR, first and immediately to the Jews, may be recommended to us, in the general reason and intention of it; to us, I say, who, though we do not enjoy the light of CHRIST's personal presence, yet we have the light of his doctrine, and the power and presence of his spirit going along with it, and supplying the absence of his person; so that in effect we have all the advantages and means of salvation, which the Jews had; and we know not how long they may be continued, or how soon they may be taken from us; and therefore the general reason and intendment of this advice concerns us equally with the Jews, and considering the uncertainty of the continuance of the means and opportunities of salvation, either to a particular people or per-

son, we may very well apply these words of our SAVI-
OUR to our selves, and as if they had been spoken by
him to us as well as to the Jews ; *Yet a little while is
the light with you ; walk while ye have the light, lest dark-
ness come upon you ; for he that walketh in darkness know-
eth not whither he goeth.*

Abstracting then from the particular occasion and
meaning of the words, I shall prosecute the general rea-
son and intention of them, as it may be accommodated
to us, and that in these following particulars.

First, as we have the like means and opportunities of
grace and salvation as the Jews had.

Secondly, in that the season of their continuance is
uncertain to us, as well as it was to them ; we know
not how long they may be continued, nor how soon they
may be taken from us.

Thirdly, in that the same duty and obligation lies upon
us, of improving the present advantages and opportu-
nities which we enjoy. *Walk while ye have the light.*

Fourthly, in that we may justly apprehend the like
danger and dismal consequence of being deprived of these
happy opportunities and advantages. *Lest darkness come
upon you ; for he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not
whither he goeth.*

Fifthly, I shall consider by what things God is more
especially provoked, to deprive a people of the means and
opportunities of grace and salvation.

And then, lastly, what is the way and means to pre-
vent so dismal a judgment, and procure, if it may be,
a lengthning of our tranquillity. I shall go over these
particulars as briefly as I can.

First, that we have the like means and opportunities
of grace and salvation, as the Jews had ; not the very
same in kind, and all the circumstances of them, as I
noted before, but the same equivalently, and in substance,
and to all the purposes of our eternal salvation and hap-
piness, if we make a right use of them. The Jews had
the personal presence and preaching of CHRIST among
them ; they did converse familiarly with him, *did eat
and drink in his presence*, and heard him teach in their

streets ; which was a very valuable and signal privilege, vouchsafed only to that people, and only in that age. For as to his personal presence and conversation, he was not sent, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

But we have still the same means and advantages in substance, which they had ; *the gospel is preached to us, as well as to them ; we have all the light and direction concerning our duty, and all the encouragement to holiness and obedience, which they had ; and there is still the same inward operation and concurrence of God's holy spirit, accompanying his word, and making way for the entertainment of it ; if there be but the same obsequiousness of faith in us, and readiness to receive the truth in the love of it, that we may be saved.*

Nay we have several advantages above them ; that the christian religion does not lie under those prejudices in respect of us, which it did with them ; it hath been now for many ages received and established among us, and the prejudice of education is on its side ; and it hath had great and manifold confirmation given to it, since our SAVIOUR's time, by the wonderful success and prevalency of it in the world, notwithstanding all the disadvantages it lay under, and the mighty opposition that was raised against it, by the remarkable fulfilling of many of our SAVIOUR's predictions concerning the final destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, and the desolation of that city, and the dispersion of the Jewish nation over the world, and their being *bated of all nations*, which hath now continued for above sixteen hundred years, and we see it at this day, as if the providence of God had ordered it on purpose, for a standing monument and testimony in all ages, of the truth of the christian religion.

So that, blessed be God, there is no want of means to *bring us to the knowledge of the truth, that we may be saved ; no want of evidence to confirm to us the truth of this religion ; there is nothing wanting on God's part ; if there be any failure and defect, it is on ours, who will not walk in the light, while we have it ; nor know in this our day the things which belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.*

Secondly,

Secondly, the season of the continuance of these means of grace and salvation, which are afforded to us, is uncertain to us, as well as it was to them. We know not how long they may be vouchsafed to us, nor how soon they may be taken away from us. *Yet a little while the light is with you*, saith our SAVIOUR to the Jews, meaning, that he himself should shortly be put to death, and removed from them. This is not just our case: but thus far it agrees, that the light of the gospel, and the blessed opportunities which thereby we enjoy, are of an uncertain continuance, and may be of a lesser or longer duration, as God pleaseth, and according as we make use of them, and demean our selves under them. I remember there is a very odd passage in Mr. Herbert's poems, which whether it be only the prudent conjecture and foresight of a wise man, or there be something more prophetic in it, I cannot tell; it is this:

*Religion stands on tiptoes in our land,
Ready to pass to the American strand.
When Seine shall swallow Tiber, and the Thames,
By letting in them both, pollute her streams,
Then shall religion to America flee;
They have their times of gospel, even as we.*

The meaning of it is this, that when the vices of Italy shall pass into France, and the vices of both shall overspread England, then the gospel will leave these parts of the world, and pass into America, to visit those dark regions, which have so long *sat in darkness and the shadow of death*. And this is not so improbable, if we consider, what vast colonies in this last age have been transplanted out of Europe into those parts, as it were on purpose to prepare and make way for such a change. But however that be, considering how impiety and all manner of wickedness do reign among us, we have too much cause to apprehend, that if we do not reform and grow better, the providence of God will find some way or other to deprive us of that light, which is so abus-

ed and affronted by our wicked and lewd lives ; and God seems now to say to *us*, as our LORD did to the Jews, *Yet a little while is the light with you ; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.* I proceed to the

Third particular, that there is the same duty and obligation upon us, that was upon the Jews, of improving the present advantages and opportunities of salvation, which we enjoy ; and our LORD says to *us*, as well as to *them*, *walk while ye have the light.* He expects from us, that we should make use of those blessed opportunities, and answer those manifold advantages, which are afforded to us, above most nations of the world ; that we should improve our knowledge in religion, and advance daily in the practice of it ; that we should *work while it is day*, and that the more light we have, the better our lives should be. For this is *to walk in the light* ; to make use of the present advantages and opportunities, and to be active and industrious *to work out our own salvation ; to be fruitful in every good word and work ; and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by JESUS CHRIST to the glory and praise of God.* The apostle St. Peter tells us at large, what obligation the knowledge of the gospel lays upon all Christians, to make answerable improvement in all goodness and vertue, *2 Pet. i. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.* *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue ; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, vertue ; and to vertue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. But he that lacketh these things, is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. If the gospel have not this effect upon*

us,

us, if we make no use of the light of it, we do not consider that the proper effect of the christian religion, is to purge men from those sins and vices which reigned in them before ; and if it have not this effect upon us, it had been better for us to have been without this light and knowledge. So the same apostle declares, *1 Cor. ii. 21. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* I proceed to the

Fourth particular, that if we make no improvement of these happy advantages and opportunities, we may justly apprehend the like danger, and dismal consequences of being deprived of them. *Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you : For he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.* God's dealing with the Jews upon this provocation was very terrible, and, as the apostle saith upon another occasion, *it serves for an example and admonition to us ; upon whom the ends of the world are come.* They who not only opposed and rejected that light which God sent among them, but did what in them lay to extinguish and put it out, by *putting to death the Son of God*, deserved to have been immediately deprived of that light, and to have been left in utter darkness : but God was pleased in his great mercy to grant a reprieve to them and to continue the great blessing of the gospel to them for forty years longer : but when, notwithstanding this they still continued impenitent, God at last withdrew this light, and by a particular providence gave warning to the Christians to flee from Jerusalem, just before the siege was laid to it ; and then *darkness came upon them* indeed, and *they knew not whither they went*, nor what they did ; *the things of their peace were then hid from their eyes, because they would not know the time of their visitation.* They fell into the greatest disorders and confusions, and, by the just judgment of God, were strangely blinded and *laden* to their own ruin, and being forsaken of God, and of his glorious gospel, which they had rejected, they exercised all sorts of violence and cruelty upon one another,

and were abandoned to all manner of wickedness and folly ; not only offending against their own law, for which they pretended so great a veneration, but committing things contrary to all laws of nature and humanity ; as may be seen at large in the history of the siege of Jerusalem, written by Josephus, who lived in that time.

And there is the like danger, I do not say of the very same judgments, (for there was something peculiar in their case, they not only rejecting and abusing the gospel, but *killing and crucifying the Son of God*, who brought those glad tidings to them ;) but of very great and dismal calamities, if ever we provoke God by our abuse of the gospel, and great unfruitfulness under it, to deprive us of so invaluable a blessing. Whenever that leaves us, we may expect the most dismal judgments and calamities to break in upon us.

For that parable concerning the husbandmen, who instead of rendring to their lord *the fruits of his vineyard in due season, evilly entreated, and killed those whom he sent to them ;* I say this parable, though it immediately respected the Jews, yet it does in proportion concern all that live unfruitfully under the gospel, *Mat. xxi. 40, 41. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen ? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.* And ver. 43, 44. *Therefore I say unto you, says our LORD, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken : But on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

The removal of the gospel from any people, as it is the greatest judgment in it self, so it is likely to be accompanied with the greatest temporal miseries and calamities : and so in fact it hath happened not only to the Jews, whose case, as I said before, hath something in it peculiar, but to other churches and nations. To the seven famous churches of Asia, the cities of them being

being demolished and laid waste, and the very place of several of them hardly known at this day. And so likewise it hath happened to the flourishing churches of Africa, where christianity is extinguished, and the place of them now the great seat of barbarism and slavery.

And GOD seems to set these examples before us, as a dreadful warning and admonition to us, and to say to us as he did to the people of Jerusalem, *Jer. vii. 2, 13, 14, 15.* *But go ye now unto my place which was Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early, and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not: Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you, and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren.* proceed to the

Fifth particular I mentioned, which is to consider, by what means GOD is more especially provoked to deprive a people of the light of the gospel, and the means of salvation. By these *two* more especially: by a general barrenness and unfruitfulness under them; and by general impiety and wickedness.

i. By a general barrenness and unfruitfulness under the means and opportunities of salvation plentifully afforded to us. This our SAVIOUR represents to us in the parable of the husbandmen, which I mentioned before, who rendered no fruit of the vineyard let out to them, for which they are threatned to have the vineyard taken from them, and let out to other husbandmen, who will render the fruits of it in their seasons. And in the same chapter, *Matth. xxi. 19.* we find our SAVIOUR cursing the fig-tree, which he saw in the way, because he found nothing thereon, but leaves only. Leaves are the outward shew and profession of religion: but if there be no fruit, we may justly fear a curse: for our SAVIOUR did not curse the fig-tree for its own sake, but for our example.

Sterilitas

Sterilitas nostra in ficu vapulat ; our barrenness is corrected and chastised in the curse which he pronounced upon the fig-tree. To the same purpose there is a remarkable parable of a barren fig-tree, and of the husbandman's patient expectation of fruit from it, *Luke xiii. 7, 8, 9.* after three years waiting, *Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none. Cut it down ; why cumberest thou the ground ? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it : And if it bear fruit, well : And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.* It is literally true, that fruit may be expected from a fig-tree, at farthest the third year ; and if in that time it do not bear, it is almost in vain to expect it : but our SAVIOUR intended by this parable to reprove the Jews, among whom he had taken so much pains for *three years*, and was now upon his *fourth*, resolving with the utmost patience to expect the fruit of repentance, and obedience to his doctrine, and then to leave them, and withdraw that light from them which they made no use of : and yet after this, he continued his apostles among them, who preached the doctrine of life and salvation to them for many years, before he punished their barrenness under all those means, by taking away his gospel from them, and giving them up to utter ruin and destruction.

2. Another and higher provocation of Almighty God to take away his gospel from a nation, is great and general impiety and wickedness, an universal corruption and depravation of manners. When *the vineyard* which God hath planted *with so much care*, doth not only *not bring forth good grapes*, but *bring forth wild grapes*, as it is in the parable of the prophet Isaiah, concerning the house of Israel : then God will *break down the hedge of it*, and *lay it waste* ; and will also *command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it*. When no means will prevail upon a people to bring them to goodness, God will then give over all care of them, and deprive them of the means whereby they should be made better. When they do not only frustrate his expectation, but do quite contrary to

what

that he looked for, he will be no farther concerned for them. So we find in the application of that parable, *Mat. v. 7. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts, is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but, behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.* And this we find under the gospel, *Heb. vi. 7, 8. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from GOD. But that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* Briers and thorns are not mere unfruitfulness under the gospel; but contempt of it, and affronting it by our wicked lives. When infidelity and contempt of religion appear openly in a nation, and impiety and vice grow upudent and universal, even when the gospel shineth in the clearest and strongest light, and the wrath of GOD not only in his word, but by his providence, and by terrible judgments in righteousness, is so plainly revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; when people are taught their duty, and the true knowledge of GOD, but will receive no instruction, but persist in their lewd and vicious courses, and commit iniquity with heedlessness; this, if any thing, is a just provocation of almighty GOD, to remove his candlestick from such a nation as this, and to leave them in darkness; since light hath no other effect upon them, but to make them more bold and extravagant. There remains only the Sixth and last particular, which I mentioned, to be spoken to, namely, what is the way and means to prevent so dismal a judgment, and to procure, if it may be, lengthning of our tranquillity, and a longer enjoyment of the means and opportunities of grace and salvation. And our best direction in this case, will be to follow the counsel which the spirit gives to the seven churches of Asia, to prevent the removing of their candlestick out of place, that is, their being deprived of the light of the gospel, which shone so clearly among them. *He then that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches.* To the church of Ephesus, *Rev. ii. 5.*

Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. To the church of Smyrna, ver. 10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. To the church of Pergamos, ver. 16. Repent ; or else I will come unto thee quickly. To the church of Sardis, chap. iii. 2, 3. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die : For I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. To the church of Laodicea, ver. 19. Be zealous therefore, and repent.

You see what are the means prescribed by the spirit of God, to prevent the removing of our candlestick out of its place ; to be sensible of our great degeneracy from our primitive piety, and the strict practice of religion, and to exercise a deep repentance for it, and effectually to reform, and do our first works. Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works. And then great vigilancy and watchfulness, that we be not surprized before we are aware. Be watchful : For if thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief ; and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Now watchfulness implies great sobriety and temperance, and is usually joined with fervent and earnest prayer. Watch ye therefore and pray always. Next, to hold fast the doctrine which we have received and heard, the faith which was once delivered to the saints, as St. Jude calls it. Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast. And lastly, zeal for God's glory, and an undaunted resolution to adhere to it, notwithstanding all dangers and sufferings. Be zealous, fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer, but be thou faithful unto the death.

If we follow this counsel, we may hope, nay we may be assured that God will still continue to us the blessed means and opportunities of grace and salvation; that our pastors shall *not be removed into corners, but that our eyes shall still see our teachers*; that God will not let darkness come upon us: or if the light of the gospel should be obscured and eclipsed, that it will be but for a little while, and will soon pass over. But if we will not hearken and obey, if we will not *repent and do our first works*, we have reason to apprehend, that God will *come against us quickly, and remove our candlestick out of its place*, and take away that light which we have abused, and carry it into some other quarter of the world; and, as our SAVIOUR threatens the Jews, *that the kingdom of God shall be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it*.

I shall only add that counsel given by the prophet Daniel to king Nebuchadnezzar, and which is very proper for a people and nation, and likewise for particular persons, for the prevention of spiritual, as well as temporal judgments, *Dan. iv. 27. Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; so that it may be a lengthning of thy tranquillity*. Nothing so likely, not only to reconcile God to us, but to turn away his judgments from us, as repentance and reformation of our wicked lives, and the practice of alms and charity. *Alms shall deliver from death*, saith the wise man, speaking of the benefit that redounds to particular persons: and by parity of reason, the charity and alms of a greater number may save a nation, both from temporal and spiritual judgments; charity and alms to the poor, especially those who are poor and destitute, by *foraking all for God and his truth*. And nothing gives greater hopes of God's mercy to us, than that general charitable disposition which appears among us.

What I have said, needs no long application; I shall therefore do it in very few words. This calls upon the whole nation, and every one of us, *to remember from whence we are fallen, and to repent and do our first works*; to endeavour to recover that ancient piety and virtue,

which flourished in the days of our forefathers, and was so great an ornament to our holy religion. Blessed be GOD, that by his goodness, and the protection of a gracious prince, we still enjoy the blessed means and opportunities of grace and salvation : but if we be still unfruitful under them, and will not *walk in the light*, the just providence of GOD may have a thousand ways to deprive us of it, and to *bring darkness upon us*.

And what I have said in general to the whole nation, and what our SAVIOUR here says to the Jews, we may accommodate every one to our selves. *Yet a little while the light is with us : Let us walk in the light, while we have it, lest darkness come upon us*. We know not how long the opportunity of *life*, as well as of *grace*, may be continued to us ; they may be taken from us, or we may be cut off from them.

The season of our solemn repentance is now approaching ; let us improve it, as if it were to be our last opportunity of making our peace with GOD : and let us lose no time ; lest we die in our delay, and in our security we be destroyed.

I will conclude with the earnest exhortation of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. xiii. 16. *Give glory to the Lord your God, that is, repent, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness*. To which I will only add the advice of our blessed SAVIOUR, Luke xxi. 36. *Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*.

SERMON CCXLIX.

The folly of hazarding eternal life,
for temporal enjoyments.

MATTH. xvi. 26.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

THE great question that a wise man puts to himself in any design or undertaking, is this, What shall I be the better for it, if I obtain what I seek for? If all things succeed according to my desire, what benefit and advantage will it be to me? or if I gain in one respect, shall I not be as great, or a greater loser in another? When all things are calculated and cast up, what will be the foot of the account? upon the whole matter, and in the final issue and result of things, what will be the gain or loss? For though the advantage appear never so great in one respect, yet if this be over-balanced by a greater hazard and loss in another kind, far more considerable; it is upon the whole matter a foolish bargain, and a wise man will not meddle with it. And this is the question which our SAVIOUR here puts, *What is a man profited? &c.*

For the understanding of which words, we must look back to the verses immediately before, wherein our SAVIOUR tells his followers, upon what terms they may be his disciples, and list themselves in his service, *ver. 24, 25. If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever will save his life, shall lose it: And whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it;* that is, whosoever by declin-

ing the profession of the gospel for fear of persecution, shall hope to save this temporal life, shall lose that which is infinitely more considerable, eternal life: and whoever for my sake and the gospel's, shall expose himself to persecution and the loss of this temporal life, shall find a better life in lieu of it, shall at last be made partaker of eternal life. And this certainly is wisdom, not to lose that which is more valuable, for the purchasing of that which is less considerable; *For what is a man profited? &c.*

What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Here our translators have unnecessarily changed the signification of the same word that was used before: for the word here translated *soul*, is the very same which is used for *life*, in the verse before; and there is no reason to alter the rend'ring of it; for the sense is very current thus: *Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?*

This was a proverbial speech used among the Jews, to signify that men value *life* above any thing in this world, and it seems to allude to that expression in Job, *Skin for skin and all that a man hath, will he give for his life*; that is, men will part with any thing in this world to save their lives.

Now this proverbial sentence, which the Jews used concerning this temporal life, our SAVIOUR does very fitly apply to the purpose he was speaking of, and argues *à fortiori* from this temporal life to eternal life. For if we think all that we have, well bestowed to ransom our lives, then much more should we be willing to part with this mortal life, and all the enjoyments of it, to purchase eternal life, which doth in true value more exceed this life, than this life does any thing else in this world.

And that our SAVIOUR doth apply this proverb of the Jews to a higher purpose, namely, to eternal life, is plain, from what he adds in the verse after the text,

For

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works ; that is, there is another life after this, wherein men shall be happy or miserable, according as they have behaved themselves in this world, and then it will appear who have made the best bargain, and who at last will prove the greatest gainers, they who by following me have hazarded this temporal life, and receive in lieu of it life eternal ; or they who by denying me, have secured their temporal lives, but forfeited the eternal life and happiness of the next world.

So that the meaning and force of our SAVIOUR'S argument is plainly this ; what advantage would it be to any man, if he could gain the whole world, and should be ruined for ever ? or what would a man, that had brought himself into this miserable condition, give to redeem and rescue himself out of it ?

And that this is plainly our SAVIOUR'S meaning, will appear, if we consider how St. Luke expresseth the same thing, *Luke ix. 25. What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, and be cast away ?* So that the emphasis and force of our SAVIOUR'S argument, is not to be laid upon the word *soul*, as our translators seem to have laid it ; for St. Luke hath omitted this word : but it lies in the application of this proverbial speech, which the Jews used concerning this temporal life, to life eternal ?

Having thus cleared the true meaning and intention of these words, I shall consider in them, what may be most useful for us to fix our thoughts and meditations upon.

In these words we have *two* cases supposed, and a question put upon each of them.

First, suppose a man should gain the whole world, and ruin himself for ever, what would be the advantage of it ? *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself ?*

Secondly, suppose a man had made such a bargain, and undone himself for ever, to gain the world : when he comes to be sensible of his folly, what would he not

give to undo this bargain? *What will a man give in exchange for his soul?* that is, to redeem and recover what he hath lost.

And indeed these questions carry their own answer and resolution in them. Suppose a man should gain the whole world, and ruin himself for ever, what advantage would it be to him? would it be any? No, certainly very far from it; for the words are a *μίσωσις*, and signify more than they seem to express; *What is a man profited?* that is, he would be so far from being a gainer, that he would be a vast loser by it.

And suppose a man had made such a bargain, had thus undone himself to gain the world, would he not reflect severely upon his own folly afterward? Yes certainly he would give the whole world, if he had it, to undo it again.

So that the sense of these words may be resolved into these *two* propositions.

First, that it is a foolish bargain for a man *to lose his soul*, and forfeit his eternal happiness, upon any terms, though it were *to gain the whole world*.

Secondly, that whoever makes this bargain, will one time or other sadly rue it, and be sensible of the monstrous folly of it. *What would a man give in exchange for his soul?* that is, what would he not give to be put in his former condition, and be left to make a new choice?

First, that it would be a most foolish bargain, for a man to purchase the whole world with the loss of his soul, and his eternal happiness.

The folly of this one would think sufficiently evident at first sight; yet we see men every day guilty of it, so that either they do not discern it, or they do not consider it; therefore to make men sensible of their monstrous folly herein, we will consider these *two* things.

I. How inconsiderable the purchase is. And,

II. How great a price is paid for it. For that is a foolish bargain, when we pay a great deal too much for a thing, a mighty price for that which is little worth.

I. The

I. The purchase is inconsiderable. Our SAVIOUR here puts the case to the greatest advantage on the purchaser's side, and makes the very best of it, he supposeth the gain much greater than any man ever made, he puts a case next to an impossibility, that *a man shall gain the whole world*, which no man ever did, or was in any probability of doing. Alexander bid fairest for it, and because he over-run a few great countries, is called *a conqueror of the world*: but let a man survey the globe, and he will soon see how small a part of the world he had mastered; it was but inconsiderable in comparison of the rest of the then known world; and much less if we take in those vast and spacious regions, which have since been discovered; so that if he had understood either the world, or himself better, he might have spared his crying for want of more to subdue. But suppose a man could *gain all the world*, and command all the conveniences and pleasures of it, yet all this, if it be duly weighed, will be found to be no great purchase, especially if we consider these *three* things.

1. If we had it all, yet the great uncertainty of holding it, or any part of it.

2. The impossibility of using and enjoying it all.

3. If we had it, and could use it all, the improbability of being contented with it. If a man had the whole world, it is uncertain whether he could hold it, or any part of it for any time; if he should hold it, it is impossible he should use and enjoy it all; if he could use it, it is probable he would not be contented with it: and what a goodly purchase is this? when it is all of it uncertain; and the greatest part of it useless to us; and when we have it, we are as far from satisfaction, as if we were without it. All these considerations must needs mightily sink the value of this purchase, and take us off from our fondness of a small part, when the whole is so inconsiderable.

1. If we had it all, the uncertainty of holding it, or any part of it. The very supposition of *gaining the world* doth imply, that it is *lost* from those that had it before; which shews the possession of these things

things to be uncertain, and that they are not sure to continue in the same hand. When Alexander conquered Darius, and took his kingdoms, just so much as Alexander got, Darius lost; so that if a man could gain the whole world from those who are now the lords and possessors of it, the very gaining of it from others, must needs be a demonstration to him of the fickleness and uncertainty of these things.

No man is sure of any thing in this world for his life, or of any considerable part of it; and if he were, yet no man is sure of his life for one moment. How many ways hath the providence of God to change the greatest prosperity of this world into the greatest misery and sorrow, and in an instant to overturn the greatest fortune, to throw down the proudest aspirer, to impoverish the wealthiest prince, and to make extremely miserable, the most happy man that ever was in this world. This change of fortune may be made by the rapine of our enemies, or the treachery of our friends; by a storm at sea, or a fire at land; by our own folly, or by the malice of others, or by the immediate hand of God.

Nay all the outward circumstances of happiness may continue firm and unshaken, and yet a man may be extremely miserable by the inward vexation and discontent of his own mind; and if riches and greatness, and prosperity would stick by us, we our selves are fickle and uncertain. *Our life is a vapour* easily blown away, and though it be the foundation of all other enjoyments in this world, yet it is as frail and inconstant as any of them; so that if a man could gain the whole world, yet this great purchase would be clogged with a double uncertainty, either of losing it, or leaving it; either of having these taken from us, or our selves snatched from them.

2. Suppose a man had gained the whole world, and were sure to keep it for a considerable time, yet it is impossible he should enjoy it all. Though no man yet ever had, yet it is possible he may have a title to the whole world, and a great deal of care and trouble to

secure

secure that against the violence and ambition of others : but a title to a thing is one thing, and the real use of it another. There are a great many things in the world, of which no man ever yet understood the true nature and proper use ; to these a man may have a title, and be actually possess'd of them ; yet no man can be said to enjoy thing farther than he understands the nature and use of it. But suppose this great man had a mind and understanding vast and boundless as his dominion and possessions are ; yet he could enjoy but a very small part of what he possesseth ; there are millions in the world, that in despite of him would share these things equally with him ; equally, I say, to all the purposes of human life, and of a temporal felicity, and enjoy as much as he.

It may perhaps give a man some imaginary pleasure, to survey in his thoughts how much he hath the command of ; but when he hath done, he cannot tell what to do with the hundred thousandth part of what he possesseth, he cannot so much as have the slight and transitory pleasure of *beholding it with his eyes*, any otherwise than in a chart or map, which every man else may do as well as he ; but as to all real benefits and advantages, he can enjoy but a very small part of the world, according to the necessity and the capacity of a man.

He hath indeed wherewithal to make himself more soft and delicate, wherewith to surfeit sooner, and to be sick oftner than other men : but whatever can minister to true pleasure and delight, and serve any real occasions of nature, there are thousands in the world will enjoy as well as he. He may have the opportunity of cloying himself with the sight of more dishes, and of being almost every day stifled in the crowd of a numerous train, and of doing every thing with a thousand eyes upon him ; but he must of necessity want both the real pleasure and enjoyment of a great many things, which even a poorer man may have ; he can neither eat with that appetite, nor sleep with that pleasure that a labouring man does. The constant fulness both
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of his stomach and table, make him incapable of ever having a feast, and the height and prosperity of his fortune, keep him from having any friends ; or which comes all to one, from knowing that he hath any ; for *that* no man can know till the change of his condition gives him the opportunity to discern between his friends and his flatterers.

So that if a man could *gain the whole world*, it would be no such mighty purchase ; and the very first thing such a man would do, if he were wise enough to contrive his own happiness, would be to take so much to himself, as would serve all the real uses and conveniences of human life, and to rid his hands of the rest, as fast as he could. And who can think it reasonable, eagerly to desire and seek after that, which a wise man would think it reasonable to part with if he had it ?

3. If it were possible that one man could *gain*, and really *use all the world*, it is a thousand to one this man would find no great happiness and contentment in it ; because we see in daily experience, that it is not the increase of riches, or the accessions of honours, that give a man happiness and satisfaction ; because *this* does not spring from external enjoyments, but from the inward frame and disposition of a man's mind ; and that man who can govern his passions, and stint his desires, will as soon find contentment in a moderate fortune, as in the revenues of a kingdom ; and he that cannot do this, is not to be satisfied with abundance ; he hath an unnatural thirst, like that of a dropsy, which is sooner quenched by abstinence, than by drinking, the more he pours in, the more he is inflamed.

He that considers the world, may easily observe, that poverty and contentment do much oftner meet together, than a great fortune and a satisfied mind. All fulness is naturally uneasy, and men are many times in greater pain after a full meal, than before they sat down. The greatest enjoyments of this world, as they are *vanity*, so they are usually attended with *vexation of spirit*.

God hath so contrived things, that ordinarily the pleasures of human life do consist more in hope than in enjoyment ; so that if a man had *gained all the world*, one of the chief pleasures of life would be gone, because there would be nothing more left for him to hope for in this world. For whatever happiness men may fancy to themselves in things at a distance, there is not a more melancholy condition, than to be at the top of greatness, and to have nothing more left to aspire after ; and he is a miserable man, whose desires are not satisfied, and yet his hopes are at an end ; so that if a man could do what Alexander thought he had done, conquer the whole world, when that work was over, he would in all probability do, just as *he* did, sit down and weep that there were nothing more left for him to do. You see then what the purchase amounts to ; suppose a man could *gain the whole world*, he would be as far from contentment, as he that possesseth the least share and portion of it. Let us now consider in the

II. Place, the price that is here supposed to be paid for it ; the man *gains the whole world*, but *he loseth his own soul*, that is, he ruins himself for ever ; he deprives himself of a happiness infinitely greater than this world can afford, and that not for a little while, but for ever ; and he exposeth himself to a misery so great, as no man that considers it, would endure for one hour, for all the pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

And now the purchase may be allowed to be very considerable, when so intolerable a price is paid for it ; when for the present enjoyment of so short and imperfect a felicity, as this world can afford, a man hath quitted his interest in a blessed immortality, and chose to *swell with everlasting burnings*. I am really afraid to tell you how much misery is involved in these few words, of *losing a man's soul* ; the consideration of it is so full of horror, that I am loth to enter into it.

The loss is *great and irreparable* ; great beyond all imagination ; for he that loseth his soul, loseth *himself* ; not his *being*, that would be a happy loss indeed ; but *that* still remains to be a foundation of misery, and the scene

scene of perpetual woe and discontent. The loss of the soul implies the loss of God, and of happiness, and all that is desirable and delightful to a reasonable creature; nay it does not only signify the privation of happiness, but the infliction of the greatest misery and torment. Could I represent to you those dismal prisons, into which wicked and impure souls are thrust, and the miseries they there endure, without the least spark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they are compassed about with woe, and lie wallowing in the flames, how they sigh and groan under the intolerable wrath of God, the insolent scorn and cruelty of devils, the severe lashes, and raging anguish, and fearful despair of their own minds, without intermission, without pity, without hope; could I represent these things to you, you were not able to hear the least part of what these miserable wretches are condemned for ever to endure.

And the loss is not only vast, but *irreparable*; the soul once lost, is lost for ever. We may part with our souls to gain the world; but if we would give a thousand worlds, we cannot regain our souls. *The redemption of a soul is precious, and ceaseth for ever.* The loss of it is so great, that nothing can recompence it; and so fatal, that it is never to be repaired. The happiness that the man parts withal, who makes this mad bargain, is so vast, both in respect of the degree and duration of it, that nothing can make amends for so great a loss; and the sufferings which the man exposeth himself to are so dreadful, *that all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them* can be no temptation to any man, to run the hazard of enduring them. Epicurus, who very well understood the rates of pain and pleasure, is peremptory in this assertion, that it is a great folly for any man to purchase pleasure with equal pain; because there is nothing got by it, they balance one another: it must surely then be a strange madness in any man, for the transitory delights of this world, to forfeit the eternal pleasures of God's presence, and for the joys of a moment, to live in pain for ever.

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And is it not then a prodigious folly that possesseth sinners, who can be contented to venture their souls, and their happiness, their immortal souls, and their everlasting happiness, upon such cheap and easy terms? The folly is great, if we only consider what an unequal price they pay for so small a purchase: but it is much greater, if we regard the foolish order of their choice; first to please themselves with a shadow and appearance of happiness, and then to be really miserable afterward. If the happiness were true and real, it were an imprudent method. As if a man should chuse to enjoy a great estate for a few days, and to be extremely poor the remaining part of his life. If there were any necessity of making so unequal a bargain, surely a man would reserve the best condition to the last; for precedent sufferings and trouble do mightily recommend the pleasures that are to ensue, and render them more tasteful than they would otherwise have been; whereas the greatest heightning of misery, the saddest aggravation of an unhappy condition, is to fall into it from the height of a prosperous fortune. It is comfortable for a man to come out of the cold to a warm fire: but if a man in a great heat shall leap into the cold water, it will strike him to the heart. Such is the fond choice of every sinner, to pass immediately out of a state of the greatest sensual pleasure, into the most quick and sensible torments. This our SAVIOUR fully represents to us in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, *Luke xvi. 25.* where Abraham is brought in upbraiding the rich man for his foolish and preposterous choice, *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst by good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* This made a vast difference; the rich man received his good things first, and then was tormented: Lazarus first received his evil things, and then was comforted; and how comfortable was Abraham's bosom to him, after he had lain in so much misery and want at the rich man's gate? and on the other hand, how grievous must pain and torment be to that man, who never was acquainted with any thing but ease and pleasure?

But it may be all this is but a supposition ; and there is no man so forsaken of his reason, and of common prudence, as to make such a bargain. Surely no man that is reasonable, no man that considers the difference between time and eternity, between a few years, and everlasting ages, can be persuaded to forego the happiness of heaven, and *to fall into the hands of the living God*, no not if the whole world were offered to him for consideration. Indeed these large terms of *gaining the whole world*, are but a supposition, which our SAVIOUR makes to shew the unreasonableness of most mens choice ; but in truth, and in effect, the case of sinners is much worse. Among all those numerous troops of sinners that go to hell in such throngs, there is not one of them that ever made himself so wise a bargain ; and though *the whole world* be but a pitiful price to be paid for a man's soul, yet so stupid are the greatest part of those creatures, whom we call reasonable, as to strike up a bargain for little scraps and portions of this world. There are but a few who stand upon such terms as this world thinks considerable. *They* are a sort of more generous sinners, than damn themselves for a crown and a kingdom, that will not do an act of injustice upon lower terms than a manor or a lordship. Alas ! most men barter away their souls for a trifle ; and set their eternal happiness to sale for a thing of nought. How many are there, who, to gratify their covetousness, or lust, or revenge, or any other inordinate passion, are content to hazard the loss of their souls ? who will go to hell rather than be out of the fashion ; and damn themselves out of meer compliment to the company, and cannot be persuaded to leave off that foolish custom of swearing, which hath neither pleasure nor profit in it, no, not to save their souls ?

Thus it is in truth, and the supposition which our SAVIOUR here makes of *gaining the whole world*, is but a feigned case, the market was never yet so high, no sinner had ever yet so great a value for his immortal soul, as to stand upon such terms ; alas ! infinitely less than *the whole world*, a little sordid gain, the gratify-

ing of a vile lust, or an unmanly passion, the smile or the frown of a great man, the fear of singularity, and of displeasing the company ; these, and such like mean and pitiful considerations, tempt thousands every day to make away themselves, and to be undone for ever.

I have done with the *first* thing, the folly of this adventure, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?* I proceed to the

Second, the severe reflection men will make upon themselves for this their folly. What would they not give to undo this foolish bargain ? *What will a man give in exchange for his soul ?* to redeem and recover so great a loss ? and sooner or later every man will be sensible of this folly ; probably in this world, but most certainly in the other ; and then, *What would a man give in exchange for his soul ?*

Whenever the sinner comes to reflect upon himself, and to consider seriously what he hath done, with what indignation will he look upon himself, and censure his own folly ? Like a man who in a drunken fit hath past away his estate for a trifling consideration ; the next morning when he is sober and come to himself, and finds himself a beggar, how does he rate himself for being such a beast and a fool, as to do that in a blind and rash heat, which he will have cause to repent, as long as he hath a day to live ?

Or if the sinner be able to keep off these thoughts, while he is well and in health, yet when is seized upon by sickness, and comes to lie upon a death-bed, he will then, in all probability, be sadly sensible what a fool he hath been : when he shall stand upon the confines of eternity, and look back upon this world. Which how considerable soever it once appeared to him, can signify nothing now that he is to leave it ; when he considers how much he hath parted with, and is now like to lose for ever, the false and treacherous advantages of a vain world, he will then need no body to convince him of his error, to aggravate his folly to him ; he now repents heartily that he was not wiser, and wisheth for nothing so much as that **GOD** would grant him time to revoke and

undo this foolish bargain ; and how glad would he be to give the world back again to secure his soul, and to throw up all his unjust gain, and the advantages he hath indirectly made by fraud or violence ? This, I doubt not, is the sense of most men, when they come to leave the world : and if it be true then, it is so now. Let us then, while the opportunities of life are before us, suffer these considerations to take place and prevail, which otherwise will wound us to the heart, and fill our souls with anguish and despair in a dying hour.

O the folly and stupidity of men ! to be so transported with present and sensible things, as to have no consideration of our future state, no pity for our souls, no sense of our everlasting abode in another world ; to be so blinded by sense, so bribed by *the pleasures of sin, which are but for a moment*, as to forfeit the happiness of all eternity ! when the pleasure is past and gone, and the dear price comes to be paid down, and our souls are leaving this world, and going to take possession of that everlasting inheritance of shame and sorrow, of *tribulation and anguish*, which we have purchased to our selves by our own folly, how shall we then repent our selves of that bargain which we have so rashly made, but can never be released from !

It is our lot, who have the souls of men committed to our charge, to see many of these sad sights. O my God ! what confusion have I sometimes seen in the face of a dying man ? what terrors on every side, what restless working, and violent throws of a guilty conscience ? and how are we tempted (who commonly are sent for too late to minister comfort to such persons) I say how are we tempted to sow pillows under their uneasy heads ; and out of very pity and compassion, are afraid to say the worst, and are grieved at our very hearts to speak those sad truths, which yet are fit for them to hear ! It is very grievous to see a man in the paroxysms of a fever, or in the extreme torment of the stone, or in the very agony of death : but the saddest sight in the world is the anguish of a dying sinner : nothing looks so ghastly, as the final despair of a wicked man, when God is *taking away his soul*.

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But whatever sense men have of these things, when they come to lie upon a sick-bed ; every sinner will most certainly be convinced, when he comes into another world. We shall then have nothing to divert us from these thoughts ; we shall feel that which will be a sensible demonstration to us of our own folly. Then men will curse those false and flattering pleasures which have cheated them into so much misery ; but their own folly most of all, for being so easily abused. Then would they give ten thousand worlds, if they had them, to recover the opportunity of a new choice ; but it cannot be : they parted with their souls once at a cheap rate ; but no price will then be accepted for the redemption of them.

O that men would consider these things in time, for they are plain and evident to those that will consider them. Our SAVIOUR tells us, we have so much evidence, that he that will not be convinced by it, *would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead to testify unto him.* We have *Moses and the prophets* ; nay, we have *the Son of God himself*, who hath revealed these things to us ; and if we would but attend to them, and suffer them to *sink into our hearts*, nothing in this world could be a temptation to any of us to do any thing, or to neglect any thing, to the prejudice of our immortal souls.

Therefore, to conclude this discourse, whenever by any present pleasure or advantage, we are tempted to provoke God, and to destroy our own souls, let us consider what an unequal bargain we make, how little we purchase, and how much we part withal. Whenever we are solicited to any sin, let us take time to answer the question here in the text, *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? &c.*

S E R M O N CCL.

The reasonableness of fearing GOD
more than man.

LUKE xii. 4, 5.

And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him.

The first sermon on this text.

THE occasion of these words will more clearly appear, if we compare this discourse of our SAVIOUR'S, as it is here recorded by St. Luke, with that fuller account of it given by St. Matthew, chap. x. where our SAVIOUR having called his disciples together, and given them their commission, and the rules and instructions they were to observe in the execution of it, he warns them likewise of the opposition they would meet with, and the persecution that would attend them in the faithful discharge of their duty; nevertheless, he bids them take courage, and boldly to proclaim the gospel, notwithstanding all the danger and hazard it would expose them to: but because this is very unwelcome and terrible to flesh and blood, to encounter the rage and fury of men, therefore to strengthen their resolution, and to fortify their spirits against these fears, he tells them of something much more terrible than the wrath or rage of men, viz. the anger and displeasure of GOD, that so he might chase away this lesser fear by a greater, *I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid, &c.*

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The words are sufficiently plain, and need no explication ; only before I come to the main proposition which is contained in them, I shall take notice of these *two* important doctrines which are supposed in the text ; the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body.

First, the immortality of the soul, which is a principle of natural religion, and not any where, that I know of, expressly asserted in scripture ; nor need it be so, being to be known by natural light, without divine revelation : but divine revelation did always suppose it, and take it for granted, as one of the foundations of religion. And I the rather take notice of it here, because I do not know any text from which it may be more immediately inferred, than from these words of our SAVIOUR, which necessarily imply these *two* things.

1. That the soul is not obnoxious to death, as the body is. *Fear not him that can kill the body, but after that hath no more that he can do ;* which St. Matthew expresseth, *cannot kill the soul.*

2. That the soul remains after the death of the body. *Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.*

Secondly, another doctrine implied in these words, is that of the resurrection of the body ; which is a doctrine of pure revelation, and most clearly and expressly revealed in the new testament : and in some sort before to the Jews, who did generally believe it before our SAVIOUR'S coming, except the sect of the Sadducees. This is supposed in the fifth verse, *But fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ;* not only the soul, but also to raise up the body which is killed, and to torment it in hell ; for so St. Matthew hath it expressly, *But fear him that can destroy both body and soul in hell.* Now the body, so long as it is dead, is devoid of sense, and so incapable of torment, till it be raised to life again. These being supposed, I come to the main observation contained in the words,

That GOD is infinitely more to be dreaded than men.

The words indeed seem to reach farther, and to be an absolute prohibition of the fear of men ; but it is an Hebrew phrase and manner of speaking, when two things are opposed, to express many times those things absolutely, which are to be understood comparatively ; as *John vi. 27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth ; but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life ;* that is, not so much for things temporal, as things eternal, incomparably more for the one than the other. So when our SAVIOUR says, *Fear not them that can kill the body*, that is, fear not men so much as GOD, fear him infinitely more. It is very lawful for us to fear men, and to stand in awe of their power, because *they can kill the body*, and death is terrible : but when the power of man comes in competition with omnipotency, and what man can do to the body in this world, with what GOD can do the body and soul in the other ; there is no comparison between the terror of the one and the other.

The truth of this will appear, by comparing these two objects of fear together, GOD and man. Fear is a passion which is most deeply rooted in our nature, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which is planted in every man's nature. We have a natural dread and horror for every thing that may hurt us, and endanger our being and happiness : now the greatest danger is always from the greatest power : so that to make good the truth of this observation, we need do no more but to compare the power of men and GOD, and the effects of both, and then to calculate the difference ; and if there appear to be a vast and infinite difference between them, it will be evident, that GOD is infinitely more to be dreaded than men.

First, we will consider the power of man, and what it is he can do ; or rather his impotency, and what he cannot do.

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Secondly, how much the power of God exceeds the power of men, and what he can do more.

First, we will consider the power of man, and what it is he can do ; which our SAVIOUR expresseth in these words ; *Be not afraid of them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.* Which signifies in general, that the power of man is finite and limited, and circumscribed within certain bounds, beyond which it cannot go ; something it can do, but not much ; it can hurt the body, yea and take away our life ; *it can kill the body*, hither it can go, and no farther.

More particularly in these words you have man's power, what he can do ; and his impotency, what he can but do, the limits and bounds of his power.

I. The power of men, and what they can do, they can *kill the body*, and take away our lives ; which includes a power of doing whatever is less. All those evils and persecutions which fall short of death, these they can inflict upon us, they can *revile us*, and *speak all manner of evil against us* ; they can *persecute us from one city to another*, and *bring us before councils*, and *scourge us in their synagogues* ; they can *spoil us of our goods*, and *deprive us of our liberty* ; they can exercise us with *bonds and imprisonments*, with *cruel mocking and scourgings*, with *hunger and thirst*, with *cold and nakedness* ; they can many ways afflict and torment us, and at last they can put us to death ; all this they can do by the permission of God ; here is the sum of their power ; give them all advantages, let them be united and combined together. Our SAVIOUR puts it in the plural number, *Fear not them* ; and let them be backed with human authority, which our SAVIOUR supposeth, when he speaks of *bringing his disciples before kings and governors*. Thus much their power amounts to.

II. We will consider the impotency of men, which will appear in these *two* particulars.

1. That they cannot do this without the divine permission.

2. That

2. That if they be permitted to do their worst, they can but do this ; *after that they have no more that they can do.*

1. They cannot do this without the divine permission. The devil, though he hath greater natural power than men, yet he could not touch Job, either in his substance or his body, without GOD's leave and permission. Men are apt to arrogate to themselves a great deal of power, forgetting whence they derive it, and on whom it depends. *Knowest not thou that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee ?* said Pilate to our SAVIOUR : but he tells him, *Thou could'st have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above,* John xix. 10, 11. All the power that men have, they have it from GOD, and he can check and countermand it when he pleaseth ; he can *restrain the rage of men,* and *put a hook in their nostrils ;* he can *still the noise of the sea,* and *the tumult of the people.*

GOD's providence is continually vigilant over us, and unless it seem good to the divine wisdom to permit men, they cannot touch or hurt us. It is added immediately after the text, that the providence of GOD extends to creatures much less than we are, and to the most inconsiderable things that belong to us ; *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them is forgotten before GOD, or falls to the ground, without the will of our father ? yea the very hairs of our heads are they not all numbred ?* Much more is the providence of GOD concerned in our lives, and the more considerable the accidents and events which befall us ; we are always under GOD's eye and care, and no man can do us the least hurt without his permission.

2. If men be permitted to do their worst, they can but do this ; *they can but kill the body, after that they have no more that they can do.* Now this implies several limitations of men's power, and abatements of the terror of it.

1. *They can but kill the body,* that is, they can only injure the worst and least considerable part of us. The power of the devil reacheth no farther than this, *this*

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was the worst mischief his malice could devise to do to Job, *to touch his bone and his flesh*, and to take away his life ; and all that the fury and rage of man can do, is to wound these vile bodies, and to spurn down these *houses of clay, whose foundations are already in the dust* : but the man's soul, which is *himself*, that they cannot touch ; though they may pierce and break the cabinet, yet they cannot seize the jewel that is in it, and get that into their power and possession ; when they have broke open this cage, *our soul will escape like a bird to his mountain*. Men may invent several instruments to torture and afflict the body ; but no weapon can be formed against the soul that can touch it or do it harm.

2. When they have killed the body, by doing this, they do but prevent nature a little, they do but antidate an evil a few moments, and bring our fears upon us a little sooner ; they kill that which must die within a few days, though they should let it alone ; they do but cut a slender that thread which would shortly break of it self, by its own weakness and rottenness ; so that as the lepers reasoned, when the famine was in Samaria, 2 Kings iii. 3, 4. *Why sit we here until we die ? If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there : and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians : if they save us alive, we shall live ; and if they kill us, we shall but die* ; so we may reason in this case, why should we so much desire to sit still till we die ? If men persecute us, and do their worst, we shall die ; and if they do not, however we shall die ; therefore let not the fear of any danger from men make us to forget our duty to God, *for if they kill us, we shall but die*.

3. *They can but kill the body* ; and what argument of power is this, to be able to kill that which is mortal ? as if you should say, they can break a glass, they can throw down that which is falling. This is no such wonderful effect of power, to be able to do that, which almost every thing can do, which the least thing in the world, which the poorest creature can do ; a pin, or a thorn, or a grape-stone ; there is hardly any thing in the whole

whole creation so inconsiderable, but it can do this which men are apt to boast of as so great an evidence of their power. We are frail creatures, and it is no mere melancholy conceit that we are made of glass, and as we pass through the world are liable to be broken in pieces by the juggle of a thousand accidents; every thing can lie in wait for us, and lurk privily for our lives. Men think it such an act of power to kill a man; whereas nothing is so easy. A man may be killed by another's kindness, as soon as by thy hatred; by his own excessive love, or joy, or hope, as well as by thy malice; so that it is no such instance and argument of power, *to be able to kill the body.*

4. The killing of the body does not necessarily signify any great mischief or harm in the issue and event. *They can kill the body*, that is, they can knock off our fetters, and open the prison doors, and set us at liberty; they can put us out of pain, thrust us out of an uneasy world, put an end to our sins and sorrows, to our misery and fears; they can *give the weary rest*, and send us thither where we would be, but are loth to venture to go; they can hasten our happiness, and make way for the more speedy accomplishment of our desires, and dispatch us to heaven sooner than otherwise we should get thither; they can kill us in the cause of God, and in the discharge of our duty; that is, they can add to our happiness, and brighten our crown, and increase the weight of our glory.

5. *They can but kill the body*, when they have done that they may give over, *here their proud waves must stop*; here their cruelty and malice, their power and wit must terminate, for they can reach no farther. When they have done all they can, they cannot annihilate us, they cannot make an utter end of us. As for the soul, they cannot come at *that* to do it any harm, neither the axe, nor the sword, nor the spear, nor the nail, nor any other instrument can wound or pierce it: and as for the body, though they wound it, and bruise it, and mangle it, yet they cannot turn it into nothing; though they may banish life from it, and make it a vile and

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loathsome carcase, yet they cannot command it out of being, it will still maintain it self under one form or other, and after it is killed, defy any thing more that can be done to it.

6. *They can but kill the body*, they cannot do the least harm to the soul, much less can they annihilate it, and make it cease to be, they cannot torment it, they cannot with all their instruments of cruelty reach and touch the spirit of a man ; they cannot throw stings into the conscience, and fill our minds with anguish and horror ; nor can they make us to torment our selves by the racking of our own thoughts ; they cannot create guilt in our minds, nor animate against us that never dying worm, nor cast despairing thoughts, nor cause self-condemning and furious reflections in our own minds, nothing of all this are they able to do.

7. And lastly, *they can but kill the body*, that is, they can but inflict temporal misery upon us ; their power, as it is but small, so it is of a short continuance, it reacheth no farther than this life, it is confined to this world ; so that what mischief men would do us, they must do it quickly, *while we are in the way*. There is no plot, nor device, nor cruelty, can be practised upon us *in the grave while they are going*. They cannot slay the dead, nor can their malice overtake those that are gone down into the pit ; the longest arm, and the most inveterate hatred cannot reach those that are got out of the land of the living. Our most powerful and deadly enemies cannot follow us beyond the grave, and pursue us into the other world. Thus Job elegantly describes the happy state of the dead, that they are out of the reach of all evil and disquiet, Job iii. 17, 18, 19. *speaking of the grave, There the wicked cease from troubling ; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there, and the servant is free from his master.* Thus you see what the power of man is, and what the effects of it, what is the worst that he can do to us ; and consequently how much he is to be feared and regarded. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to speak to, namely, how much the power of GOD exceeds the power of man ; which our SAVIOUR declares in these words, *Who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell.*

Which in general signifies, that his power is infinite and unlimited. GOD cannot only do what man can do, but infinitely more ; his power is not confined to the body, but he hath power over the spirit ; he cannot only make body and soul miserable in this world, but in the other ; not only for a time, but to all eternity.

More particularly in these words you have implied all those advantages which the power of GOD hath above the power of man. Not to insist upon that, which yet the text takes notice of, that GOD can do all that man can do ; *he can kill the body*, which is implied in these words, *after he hath killed*. He can blast our reputation, and ruin our estate, and afflict our bodies with the sharpest pains, and smite us with death. And GOD doth all that with ease, which men many times do with great labour and endeavour ; they are glad to use the utmost of their wit and power and contrivance to do us mischief ; but GOD can do all things by a word : if he do but speak, judgments come : we are but a little dust, and the least breath of GOD can dissipate us : he hath all creatures at his command, ready to execute his will. So that whatever man, or any creature can do, that GOD can ; and infinitely more : and this is that which I shall briefly open to you, wherein the power of GOD doth exceed the power of man, in these following particulars.

1. GOD's power is absolute, and independent upon any other ; not subject to be at any time checked and controlled by a superior power, because there is none greater, none above it. *There is a higher than the highest* upon earth, and one that may say to the greatest and proudest of the sons of men, *What dost thou ?* GOD can forbid any man to execute his purpose, when he is most firmly resolved and determined ; but when he hath a mind to manifest his power, he needeth not ask any

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any man's leave. *Fear him that hath power, ἐξουσίαν ἔχοντα*, that hath authority; he hath an independent power, and a sovereign right over the lives of men, because they are all his creatures, and when he will put forth his power, there is none can resist or challenge him. God did once force this acknowledgment from one of the greatest and proudest kings of the earth, Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 35. *He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can say unto him, What dost thou?*

2. His power reacheth to the soul as well as the body. He can annihilate soul and body. He that brought all things into being by his word; can with as much ease make them vanish into nothing; as *he spake the word, and they were made*; so he can command, and they shall not be. By the least breath of his mouth he can turn us into nothing; nay, upon the very withdrawing of those influences of his power and goodness, whereby we are maintained and supported in being, our bodies would vanish and *fly away like a shadow*, and our spirits also would fail before him, and the souls which he hath made.

And as he can annihilate the souls of men, if he please, so he can torment them. He that made our souls, and can make them happy, can likewise make them miserable; for he is a spirit, and hath power over ours; he can *shoot his arrows* into them, and make them *stick fast* there; he can wound our souls with invisible darts, and fill our spirits with secret anguish and amazement. When he sends a sword without to destroy our bodies, he can send terrors within to torment our minds; he can *distract us with terrors*, as David speaks, Psal. lxxxviii. 15. nay, he can make us a terror to our selves, and by letting loose our thoughts upon us, can make us more miserable, than all the tyrants in the world can do, by the most exquisite torments; and that in this life, as we see in the instance of Francis Spira. When *the father of spirits* will take us under correction, he can chastise us to purpose, and make our own guilty consciences to sting and lash us, and

our minds to torture themselves by furious reflections upon themselves. All this God can do in this life.

3. In the other world he can raise our bodies again, and re-unite them to our souls, and cast them into hell, and torment them there. This is that which St. Matthew calls *destroying body and soul in hell*. And what the misery of that state shall be, the scripture in the general gives us an account, describing it to us by the greatest anguish, and the most sharp and sensible bodily torments, by *the worm that dies not*, that is, that guilt which shall eternally gnaw the consciences of sinners; and by *the fire which is not quenched*, that is, the everlasting pains of the body.

In the other world God will raise the bodies of wicked men, and re-unite them to their souls, and cast them together into hell, to be tormented there; and this is that which is called *the second death*: and as tortured persons, when they are taken off the rack, have their joints new set, to be new rackt again; so the bodies of wicked men shall be raised to a new life, that they may be capable of new pains.

The state of miserable men is set forth to us by the most sharp pains, and sensible torments; by the pain of burning, Matth. xxv. 41. *Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire*. The rich man in the parable cried out, that he was *tormented in flames*; and in the Revelations, the wicked are said to be *cast into a lake of fire and brimstone*. Fire is the most active thing in nature, and brimstone the most combustible, to shew how quick and sharp the torment of sinners shall be; and it shall be universal, they shall be *cast into the lake*, their torments shall be sharp as that of burning, and as universal as if they were drowned in flames. And to shew how great a sense they shall have of these sufferings, the scripture describes those who are condemned to these hideous pains, lamenting and wringing their hands, and *gnashing their teeth* for very anguish, Matth. xxiv. 51. *There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*. Thus the scripture represents to us the dismal state of the damned,

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possibly after this sensible manner, that it may accommodate things to our capacity ; but to be sure if these be not the very torments of hell, they shall be every whit as dreadful, as great as the terrors of God's wrath, which ill men have laid up in store for themselves, can afford ; and very probably they are of that nature, and so great as not to be capable of being fully described by any thing that we are now acquainted withal ; for *who knows the power of God's anger ?* Who can imagine the worst that omnipotent justice can do to sinners ? As the glory of heaven and joys of God's presence are now inexplicable to us, so likewise are the torments of hell, and the miseries of the damned. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of men,* those dreadful things which God hath laid up for them that hate him.

4. Which is the most dreadful consideration of all, God can punish for ever. The wrath of man is but a blast, a storm that is soon over ; all misery and torments that men can inflict expire with this life : but the miserable effects of the divine displeasure extend themselves to all eternity. For this reason the judgment of God is called *an eternal judgment*, Heb. vi. 2. because the sentence which shall then be passed upon men, shall assign them to an eternal state ; and the punishment that in pursuance of this sentence shall be inflicted upon sinners, is called *an everlasting punishment*, Matth. xxv. 46. and the instruments of their torment are said to be *everlasting*, Matth. xxv. 41. it is called *everlasting fire*. And Mark ix. 44, 48. you have it there three times repeated, *Where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched. The smোক of the bottomless pit is said to ascend for ever and ever*, Rev. xiv. 5. and Rev. xx. 10. it is said, that *the wicked shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever*, without intermission and without end.

It must needs be then, as the apostle says, Heb. x. 31. *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, that is, the God that lives for ever : because he that lives for ever, can punish for ever. And

this is that which makes the great difference between the effects of the wrath of man, and the displeasure of God ; the wrath of man, and the effects of it, are but for a moment ; but the effects of God's displeasure extend themselves to all eternity.

By these particulars which I have briefly gone over, you may see who is the great object of our fear ; and when you have calculated the difference between God and man, you will find that there is no proportion between the impotency of man, and the omnipotency of God, between those evils that men can inflict upon us, and *the terrors of the LORD*, and consequently what great reason we have to be afraid of offending God, and transgressing our duty in any kind, to avoid any temporal danger and inconvenience. But I shall not now enter upon the application of this serious and weighty argument.

S E R M O N CCLI.

The reasonableness of fearing God
more than man.

St. LUKE xii. 4, 5.

And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear : fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him.

The second sermon on this text.

I Proceed now to apply this serious and weighty argument, and to draw some useful inferences from it.

I. That religion doth not design to annihilate and to root out our passions, but regulate and govern them ; it does not wholly forbid and condemn them, but determine them to their proper objects, and appoint them their measures and proportions ; it does not intend to extirpate our affections, but to exercise and employ them aright, and to keep them within bounds. Religion does not aim to extirpate our love, and joy, and hope, and fear ; but to purify and direct them, telling us how we should love God with the highest and most intense degree of affection, as the Supreme Good deserves, *with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds, and with all our strength*, and other things only in subordination to him. Religion refines our joy and delight from the dregs of sensual pleasure, raising them to better objects, requiring us *to rejoice in the LORD evermore*, and *to rejoice that our names are written in heaven* ; it raiseth our hopes above the favour of men, and tells us whom we should fear above all, the great and terrible God, whose power is infinitely above the power of men.

Now

Now that which propounds objects to our passions, and sets bounds to them, did never intend the utter extirpation of them ; but this religion doth.

II. We may infer likewise from hence, that it is not against the genius of true religion, to urge men with arguments of fear. No man can imagine there would have been so many fearful threatnings in scripture, and especially in the gospel, if it had not been intended they should have some effect and influence upon us. Some look upon all arguments of fear as *legal*, and *gond'ring to bondage*, as contrary to the genuine spirit and temper of the gospel ; and look upon preachers, who urge men with considerations taken from the justice of God, and *the terrors of the LORD*, as of an unevangelical spirit, as *the children of the bondwoman, and not of the free*, as those who would bring men back again to *mount Sinai*, to *thunder and lightning*, to *blackness, and darkness, and tempest* : but will such men allow our SAVIOUR and his apostles to have been evangelical preachers ? If so, it is not contrary to the gospel to use arguments of terror ; they thought them very proper to deter men from sin, and to bring them to repentance, *Acts xvii. 30, 31. But now commandeth all men every where to repent : because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.* And the same apostle tells us, that one principal thing which made the gospel so powerful for the salvation of men, was the terrible threatnings of it, because *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, Rom. i. 16.* And *2 Cor. v. 10.* the apostle puts Christians in mind of the judgment of CHRIST, *We must all stand before the judgment seat of CHRIST.* And lest any should doubt whether this were a proper argument to work upon Christians under the gospel, he tells us, that he mentioned it for this very purpose, *ver. 11. Knowing therefore the terrors of the LORD, we persuade men.*

Some are so tender, that they cannot bear any other arguments but such as are taken from the free grace of God, and the free love of CHRIST. If we mention to them the wrath of God, and the torments of hell, we grate

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grate upon them ; but if we consider the primitive preaching of CHRIST and his apostles, and will be concluded by their pattern, we must allow the necessity and usefulness of these arguments.

And indeed, if we consider the nature and reason of things, nothing is more apt to work upon sinners, than arguments of fear. Hence it is that the wisdom of mankind hath thought fit to secure the observance of human laws by the fear of punishment. Fear is deeply rooted in our nature, and immediately flows from that principle of self-preservation which is planted in every man ; it is the most wakeful passion in the soul of man, and so soon as any thing that is dreadful and terrible is presented to us, it alarms us to flee from it : and this passion doth naturally spring up in our minds from the apprehension of a deity, because the notion of a God doth include in it power and justice, both which are terrible to guilty creatures, so that fear is intimate to our being, and God hath hid in every man's conscience a secret awe and dread of his presence, of his infinite power and eternal justice.

Now fear being one of the first things that is imprinted upon us from the apprehension of a deity, it is that passion, which above all other gives the greatest advantage to religion, and is the easiest to be wrought upon. Hence the wise man does so often call *the fear of the LORD, the beginning of wisdom*, because here usually religion begins, and first takes hold of this passion, *Prov. xvi. 6. By the fear of the LORD, men depart from evil.* Fear is a good sure principle, and one of the best guards and securities against sin, other passions are fickle and inconstant, but we cannot shake off our fears, nor quit our selves of them, so long as we believe the reality of the object ; there will be fear and terror in a guilty conscience, so long as it believes a holy, and just, and omnipotent God, and that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Other passions are more under the government of reason, as our love, and hope, and anger ; but fear is the most natural, and most deeply rooted in the sensitive nature, and therefore is common to us with all other creatures,

tures, who have any considerable degree of sense, or any other passion ; and we may observe those creatures, who scarce betray any other passion, to be fearful of danger, and to flee from it. Now fear having less to do with reason, the effects of it are less to be hindered. All the reason in the world cannot command down our fears, unless the danger be removed, or some probable way shewn of avoiding or mastering it ; and therefore arguments of fear are great eloquence, and have a mighty force and power of persuasion. *Knowing therefore the terrors of the LORD*, says St. Paul, *we persuade men*. One of the best sort of arguments to fright men from sin, and to bring them to their duty, are *the terrors of the LORD*. These take the fastest and surest hold of men, even of the most obstinate and obdurate sinners ; for arguments of love and kindness will work but little upon such persons, some ingenuity is required to be swayed by such considerations ; but the perversest creatures love themselves, and may be wrought upon by arguments of fear : so that it is agreeable both to the nature of man and of religion, to propound such arguments to our consideration.

III. The fear of GOD is the best antidote against the fear of men. We are very apt to be awed by men, and to start from our duty for fear of temporal evils, and sufferings. This fear seized upon St. Peter, and made him deny his master. And where the fear of men does not prevail so far, yet it will many times make men shie and timorous in the owning of religion in the times of danger. This made Nicodemus to come to our SAVIOUR by night, *John iii. 2*. So likewise *many of the rulers who believed in CHRIST*, durst not *make open confession of him, lest they should have been put out of the synagogue, John xii. 42*. Some men that have good inclinations to the truth, and are inwardly convinced of it, yet in times of danger they love to be wise and cautious, they have an eye to a retreat, and are loth to venture too far. But if we give way to these fears, and suffer them to possess us, we shall be exposed to many temptations, and be liable to be seduced from our duty. So

Solomon

Solomon observes, *Prov. xxix. 25. The fear of man bringeth a snare.*

Now if we would cast out this fear of men, it must be by a greater fear, which is stronger and more powerful; and that is the fear of God, *Isa. viii. 12, 13. Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid*; speaking of the fear of men, against which he prescribes this remedy, *sanctify the LORD of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* If God be once the object of our fear, and we be thoroughly possess'd with awful apprehensions of him, the frowns of men, and the wrath and displeasure of the greatest upon earth, will signify nothing to us. This preserved Moses amidst all the temptations of a court, *Heb. xi. 27. He feared not the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.* He could easily bear the anger of Pharaoh, when by faith he beheld the omnipotent justice of the King immortal and invisible.

IV. If God be infinitely more to be dreaded than men, then *who is to be obeyed, God or men?* judge ye. I speak not this to diminish our reverence to magistrates, and their authority; for by persuading men to fear God, who commands obedience to magistrates, we secure their reverence and authority: but when the commands of men are contrary to God's, and come in competition with them, Shall we not hearken to him, who is supreme, the great and most powerful? Shall we not obey him who hath the most unquestionable authority over us, and right to command us? Shall we not dread him most, who is to be feared above all; who can be the best friend, and the worst enemy, is able to give the greatest rewards to our obedience, and to revenge himself upon us for our disobedience by the most dreadful and severe punishments? The great Socrates, when he was accused by the Athenians for corrupting and seducing the youth of Athens by his philosophy, makes this generous defence for himself, more like an apostle than a philosopher, "That he believed this province was committed to him by God, that he was called by him to this employment, to endeavour to reform the world; and
"there-

“ therefore for him to forsake his station for fear of death,
 “ or of any other temporal evil, would be a most grievous
 “ sin.” And afterwards (as Plato gives us the account of it) he says, *I am not afraid to die : but this I am afraid of, to disobey the commands of my superior, and to desert the station he hath placed me in, and to give over the work which he hath appointed me ; and therefore, says he, If you would dismiss me upon these conditions, that I would forbear for the future, to instruct the people, and if after this I be found so doing, I should be put to death : if I might be released upon these terms, I would not accept them ; I would thank you for your good will, but this I must affirm to you, that I ought to obey GOD rather than you ; and so long as I have breath, I will never give over exhorting and teaching the people, and inculcating the precepts of philosophy upon every one I meet with.*

Could a heathen, who had but very obscure apprehensions of the rewards of another life, in comparison of what Christians have by the revelation of the gospel, could he take up this brave resolution, and die in it ? Did he with so much constancy despise the wrath and reproaches of men, and with so much cheerfulness entertain death, rather than to flinch from his duty ? How does this upbraid the cowardice of many Christians, who are so easily deterred from their duty, and are apt to quit their religion for fear of sufferings ? Since *life and immortality is brought to light by the gospel, and the wrath of GOD is so clearly revealed from heaven, what a folly is it for any man to chuse iniquity rather than affliction, as the expression is in Job ; and to forfeit the favour of GOD, for the friendship of the world ?*

The fear of men will not be a sufficient plea and excuse for men at the day of judgment ; it will not then be enough to say, this I was awed into by the apprehension of such a danger, by the fear of such sufferings ; to avoid such an inconvenience, I knowingly committed such a sin ; for fear of being persecuted, I violated my conscience, and chose rather to trust GOD with my soul, than men with my estate ; to save my life, I renounced my religion, was *ashamed of CHRIST,*

and denied him before men. Our SAVIOUR hath told us plainly, that this will not serve us at the great day, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his father with his holy angels.* And *Rev. xxi. 8.* in that catalogue of sinners which shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, the fearful and unbelievers are particularly mentioned.

And indeed they who out of fear of men offend God, are guilty of this unreasonable folly, they incur the danger of a greater evil, to avoid a less, and to save their estates or their lives, they plunge themselves into hell; whilst they are endeavouring to escape the hands of men that shall die, they fall into the hands of the living God.

Lastly, if God be the great object of our fear, let all impenitent sinners represent to themselves the terrors of the LORD, and the power of his anger. This consideration, if any thing in the world will do it, will awaken them to a sense of the danger of their condition, and of the fatal issue of a wicked life. Were but men possessed with due apprehensions of the power of God; the fear of men, and what they can do to us, would have no influence upon us, in comparison of the fears of divine vengeance. Were we sensible what it is to displease God, in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways, who can make us as miserable, as we are capable of being, and more miserable than we can now imagine, not only in our bodies, but in our souls, not only in this world, but in the other, not only for a time, but without end; would not this make us afraid to offend and displease him?

Can any consideration be more powerful to restrain us from sin, and to argue us to repentance and obedience, than this? We may oppose the eternal displeasure of God, not only to all the pleasures of sin, but to all the terrors of sense, which are but for a moment. When men would allure us to sin by the baits and temptations of pleasure, or discourage and deter us from our duty by the threatenings of danger and sufferings; let us oppose to these

the anger of the great God, and the infinite treasures of his wrath; and the serious thoughts of this will blunt the edge of all temptations, and quench all motives and incentives to sin.

Do we fear the wrath of man, whose power is short, and *whose breath is in his nostrils*, who can but afflict a little, and for a little while; and is not the wrath of the eternal God much more dreadful? Is not *destruction from the LORD, a terror to thee*? Dost thou *fear man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as grass*? And dost thou stand in no awe of *him who lives for ever*? Is the fear of men so prevalent upon us, and shall not *the terrors of the LORD* have a much greater effect upon us? God is the supreme, and indeed the only object of our fear, in comparison of whom nothing else is to be dreaded, *Psal. lxxvi. 7. Thou, even thou art to be feared, and who may stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry*? And *Psal. xc. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger*? *As is thy fear, so is thy wrath.* No passion in the soul of man is more infinite and unbounded than our fear, it is apt to fill our minds with endless jealousies and suspicions of what may befall us, of the worst that may happen: but if we should extend our fears to the utmost of what our wild and affrighted imaginations can reach to, they could not exceed the greatness of God's wrath; *as is thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

Let us then consider things impartially, and fear him most who hath the greatest power, and consequently whom of all other persons in the world it is most dangerous to offend. Let us set before us God and men; the single death of the body, and the forest and most sensible torments of body and soul together; temporal afflictions and sufferings, and eternal pains and sorrows; and when we are apt to *fear what men can do unto us*, let us consider how much more *he can do, to whom power belongs*, if for fear of men we will venture to provoke him. When men threaten us with a prison; let us think of *the chains of darkness*: when they would terrify us with fire and faggot; let us think of *the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*: when we are threatened

threatned with banishment ; let us consider how great a misery it will be to be banished from the glorious and blissful presence of GOD for ever ; when the danger of a temporal death is presented to us ; let us remember the *worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched.*

Ye that are so bold as to offend GOD, and affront the Almighty to his face, by profane blasphemies, and impudent impiety, consider what ye do, how great a danger you run upon, to what fearful misery you expose yourselves, whenever you thus offend him ; think of that question of the apostle, and answer it if you can ; *Will ye provoke the LORD to jealousy ? Are ye stronger than he ?* Take warning on this side hell, while ye may escape it ; *flee from the wrath which is to come*, while it is yet to come, before it overtake you, and there be no escaping.

And let it not be grievous to us, to be put in mind of these terrible things. How much easier is it now to hear of them, while they may be avoided, than to endure them hereafter, when they will be both unavoidable and intolerable ? And look upon them as the best and most faithful friends, who deal plainly with you in these matters, and acquaint you with the true state of things, and tell you nothing but what you will certainly find true, if you persist in this dangerous course of offending GOD ; who represent things to you as they are, and forewarn you of so great and certain a danger.

It is no pleasure to any man to speak of such dreadful and tragical things ; it can be no delight to affright men, and to grate upon their ears with such harsh and unwelcome words : but it is necessary to the greatest part of sinners, to set their danger before them in the most terrible and frightful manner ; and all this little enough to awaken the greatest part of mankind to due consideration of their ways. Soft words, and sober reason, and calm arguing, will work upon some persons ; some sinners are more yielding, and may be taken in upon parley : but others are so obstinate and resolved, that they are not to be carried but by storm ; and in this case, violence is the greatest act of friendship and kindness. Our SAVIOUR, when he spake these terrible

words to his disciples, and gave them this warning, does insinuate, that it proceeded from a most sincere and hearty friendship to them: *And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear, &c.*

S E R M O N CCLII.

The efficacy of prayer, for obtaining the holy spirit.

St. LUKE xi. 13.

How much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?

The first sermon on this text.

THE great advantages which we have by the christian religion, are these *three*.

1. A more perfect rule for the direction of our lives.
2. A more powerful assistance to enable us to the performance of our duty. And,
3. The assurance of a glorious and an eternal reward.

And all these are contained in that excellent sermon of our blessed SAVIOUR upon the mount; of which this passage in St. Luke is a part, although it was spoken here by our SAVIOUR upon another occasion, and at another time.

Our SAVIOUR begins that sermon with the last of these, as being the great motive and encouragement to our duty, the promise of blessedness, and of a great reward in heaven.

And

And then he lays down the rule which was the substance of those moral duties, which are contained in the law and the prophets ; only he explains and supplies whatever was obscure and defective before, and thereby brings our duty to a greater certainty, and clearness, and perfection than it had before.

But because this would have signified little to us, if we be still unable to perform our duty, and to obey that law which God hath given us, and to the obedience whereof he hath promised so great a reward ; therefore that nothing might be wanting to excite and encourage our obedience, our blessed SAVIOUR, after he had made our duty as strict as is possible, lest we should faint and be discouraged under an apprehension of the impossibility, or extreme difficulty of performing what he requires of us, is pleased to promise an assistance equal to the difficulty of our duty, and our inability of our selves to perform it ; knowing that we are without strength, and that nothing is a greater discouragement to men from attempting any thing, than an apprehension that they have not sufficient strength to go through with it, not being able of themselves alone to do it, and despairing of assistance from any other.

And this is the great discouragement that most men lie under, as to the business of religion ; they are conscious to themselves of their own weakness, and not sufficiently persuaded of the divine assistance ; like the lame man in the gospel, that lay at the pool of Bethesda to be healed ; he was not able to go in himself, and none took that pity of him as to help him in.

Hence it comes to pass, that a great many are disheartned from engaging in the ways of religion, because some spies, those who have only taken a superficial view of religion, have brought up an evil report upon that good land, which they pretend to have searched, saying, as they of old did, when they returned from searching the land of Canaan, Num. xiii. 31, 32, 33. *We be not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we: And they brought up an evil report of the land*

which they had searched, unto the children of Israel, saying, the land thorow which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and all the people that we saw in it, are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own fight, as grasshoppers, and so we were in their fight. Just thus we are apt to misrepresent religion to our selves, as if the difficulties of it were unsupportable, and the enemies which we are to encounter were infinitely too strong for us; not considering that *the LORD is with us*, and notwithstanding our own impotency and weakness, yet by his strength, we may be (as St. Paul expresseth it) *more than conquerors*.

Therefore to remove this discouragement, and to put life into the endeavours of men, our blessed SAVIOUR assures us that GOD is ready to assist us, and to supply our weakness and want of strength by a power from above, even by giving us his holy spirit, which is a *spirit of might, and of power, and of the fear of the LORD*, as he is called by the prophet; and he is ready to bestow so great a gift upon us on the easiest terms and conditions imaginable; if we will but *ask* this blessing of him, *How much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?*

How much more? which words are an argument from the less to the greater, by which our SAVIOUR, from the confidence which children naturally have in the goodness of their earthly parents, that they will not deny them things necessary and convenient for them, if they earnestly beg them at their hands, argues Christians into a great confidence of the good will of their heavenly father, and of his readiness *to give his holy spirit to them that ask him?*

The force of which argument depends upon a double comparison, of the quality of the persons giving; and of the nature of the gift.

1. The quality of the persons giving, *fathers upon earth*, and our *heavenly father*. If *earthly fathers* be naturally disposed to give good things to their children,

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how much more may we believe this of our *heavenly father* ; if they who are but *men* have so much goodness ; how much more confidently may we presume it of God, who excels in all perfections, and whose goodness excels all his other perfections ? If they who are *evil*, that is, many times envious, and ill natured, and at the best, but imperfectly good ; how much more God, who is *infinitely good*, and even *goodness* it self ? If they who are many times *indigent*, or but meanly provided of the good things they bestow, and if they give them to their children, must want them themselves ; how much more God, who is not the less *rich* and *full* for the overflowings of his bounty, and can never impair his estate, nor impoverish himself by conferring of his blessings and benefits upon others ?

2. If we compare the nature of the gifts. If earthly parents that are evil, be ready to bestow *good things* upon their children, things necessary and convenient only for their bodies and this life ; how much more confidently may we believe the good God inclined to bestow upon his children *the best things*, things necessary for their souls, and conducing to their eternal life and happiness ?

So that in the handling of these words, I shall

First, endeavour to shew what is comprehended in this gift of the holy spirit, and how great a blessing and benefit it is.

Secondly, what kind of asking is here required.

Thirdly, to confirm and illustrate the truth of this proposition, that God is very ready to give the holy spirit to them that ask him.

Fourthly, to remove a considerable objection to which this discourse may seem liable. And,

Fifthly, to make some practical application of it to our selves.

First, I shall shew what is comprehended in this gift of the holy spirit, and how great a blessing and benefit it is. St. *Mattbew* expresseth this somewhat differently, *chap. vii. 11.* *How much more shall your father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?*

him ? Which compared with the expression here in *St. Luke*, doth intimate to us, that the Spirit of God is the chief of blessings, or rather the sum of all good things. The promise here in the text is not express so generally as it is in *St. Matthew* ; but our evangelist instanceth in the greatest gift that God can bestow upon his children ; the gift of his holy Spirit, which is indeed the chief of all other, the sum and comprehension of all spiritual blessings ; for it contains in it the presence and residence, the continual influence and assistance of God's holy Spirit upon the minds of men, together with all the blessed fruits and effects of it, in the sanctifying and renewing of our hearts, in all those particular graces and virtues, which are in scripture called *the fruits of the Spirit* ; in *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, in *sealing us up to the day of redemption*, and in being a *pledge of our future inheritance*, and of a blessed resurrection to eternal life. All these are mentioned in scripture, as the fruits and effects of God's holy Spirit, and therefore it will come within the compass of this promise concerning the gifts of God's Spirit ; *How much more shall your heavenly Father, &c.*

And which I desire may be especially considered, because it will conduce very much to the clearing of some difficulties in my following discourse. By the gift of God's holy Spirit, is not only meant the common and transient operations of God's Spirit upon the minds of men, exciting and disposing them to that which is good ; (for thus the Spirit was given to men in all ages from the beginning of the world) but the special presence and residence, the permanent and continued influence and conduct of God's holy Spirit, as a constant and powerful principle of spiritual life and activity in good men ; in which sense the scripture tells us, that the Holy Ghost *resides and dwells* in believers, that they *live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and are led by the Spirit* : for this phrase of *the giving of the Holy Ghost*, or of *God's Spirit*, does always (I think) in the new testament signify either the miraculous and extraordinary gifts conferred upon the apostles and primitive Christians,

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Christians, in order to the effectual planting and propagating of the gospel, and so it is used *Acts* v. 32. where St. Peter says, that *the Holy Ghost, whom God had given to them that obey him, was a witness of the resurrection and ascension of our SAVIOUR*, that is, gave testimony and confirmation thereto : or else for the special residence, and continual influence and assistance of God's holy spirit in and upon the minds of good men. And so we find this phrase frequently used, *Rom.* v. 5. *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* ; meaning for the strengthening and assistance of believers to all patience and long-suffering under the persecutions which attended them ; for so the apostle reasons, *We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* ; that is, for our support and assistance under sufferings. So likewise, *1 Thess.* iv. 8. where defiling of our bodies by lust, is called *a despising of God, who hath given unto us his holy spirit* ; that is, *to dwell in us* ; for which reason the same apostle calls our bodies *the temples of the Holy Ghost, and of God*, *1 Cor.* iii. 16. *Know ye not that ye are the temples of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you.* And, chap. xvi. 19. *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you ?*

And *1 John* iii. 24. God is said to give us his spirit to enable us to keep his commandments ; *He that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in him, and he in him : and hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the spirit which he hath given us*, And chap. iv. 13. *Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit.* So that the gift of God's spirit doth imply his continual residence in good men ; and his powerful assistance of them to all the purposes of holiness and obedience ; and not only a transient operation upon the minds of men, by some good motions and suggestions, which is common to bad men, and those who are in a sinful and unregenerate state.

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Secondly, we shall in the next place consider, what kind of asking, in order to the obtaining of this great blessing, is here required by our SAVIOUR, when he says, *GOD will give his holy spirit to them that ask him*. It must have these *three* qualifications.

1. It must be hearty and sincere, in opposition to formal and hypocritical asking.

2. It must be earnest, and fervent, and importunate, in opposition to cold, and faint, and careless asking.

3. It must be in faith, and a confident assurance that GOD will hear us, in opposition to doubting and distrust.

1. It must be hearty and sincere, in opposition to formal and hypocritical asking. When we pray for GOD's grace, and holy spirit, we must not be *as the hypocrites are*, who pray not so much to be heard of GOD, as *to be seen of men*; who have no sense of their wants, no hearty desires to obtain those blessings which they beg of GOD, but only pray out of form and custom, or for ostentation of their piety and devotion. It is not every prayer that is put up to GOD out of form and custom, that will prevail with GOD, for the assistance of his grace and holy spirit; but it must be serious and in good earnest, it must proceed from a true and real sense of our need of GOD's holy spirit, such a sense as children have of their want of bread, when they are pinched with hunger.

2. This asking must be earnest, and fervent, and importunate, in opposition to cold, and faint, and indifferent asking; because this declares the sincerity of our desires. Those things which we are careless and indifferent about, and do not much matter whether we have them or not, we ask them coldly, and but seldom; if they be not granted at the first asking, we give them over, and look no farther after them: but those things which we heartily desire, and are truly sensible of our want of them, we will use more earnestness and importunity for the obtaining of them; and if we cannot obtain them at first, we will renew our requests, be instant and urgent for them, and if there

there be any hopes, never give over till we have prevailed.

And that in this manner we ought to beg of God his holy spirit, our SAVIOUR declares in those metaphors which he useth of *asking*, and *seeking*, and *knocking*, which signify earnestness, and diligence, and importunity, *ver. 9, 10.* *I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* And we have this more plainly declared in the parable before the text, *ver. 5, 6, 7, 8.* *And he said unto them, which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, friend, lend me three loaves: for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him: And he from within shall answer and say, trouble me not, the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise, and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend: yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.* If mere impudence and importunity in asking, will prevail so much with men, what will not humble and constant supplication obtain from God? And so our SAVIOUR applies this familiar parable, that in like manner we should be importunate with God for spiritual blessings, and as it were give him no rest, till we obtain what we ask, *I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you, &c.* Not that mere importunity prevails with God: but as it is an expression of a just sense of our wants, and of a confident persuasion of God's goodness, so it is effectual to procure the greatest blessings at God's hands.

3. We must ask in faith, and a confident assurance that God will hear us, in opposition to doubting and distrust; with the same, nay with greater confidence and assurance than children come to their earthly parents, to ask those things of them that are most necessary for them. And this condition or qualification of our prayers our SAVIOUR doth elsewhere frequently require, *Matth.*

xxi. 22. *All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.* And St. James, chap. i. 5, 6. directing those who want spiritual wisdom, to ask it of God, immediately subjoins, *but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering*; that is, not doubting but that God, to whom he addresseth his prayer, is both able and willing to give him what he asks: and whoever comes to God, not having this apprehension of him, *Let him not think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord*, ver. 7. For upon what ground does he expect any thing from that person, whom he looks upon either as unable, or unwilling to grant his desires? I proceed in the

Third place, to confirm and illustrate the truth of this proposition, that God is very ready to give the holy spirit to them that ask him. And for the proof of this, I shall only use *two* arguments; from God's free promise and declaration; and from the comparison which our SAVIOUR here useth in the text.

1. From God's free promise and declaration. And besides that here in the text, I might produce several others, but I shall mention only one, which is very plain and express, and conceived in terms as large and universal, as can well be devised, James i. 5. *If any of you (says the apostle, speaking of Christians) lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* Where by *wisdom*, according to St. James's notion of it, are meant all *the fruits of the spirit*, all christian graces; for so he tells us, chap. iii. 17. that *the wisdom which is from above*, that is, which is wrought by the divine spirit, *is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and of good fruits.* Now if God have freely promised so great a blessing and benefit to men, if they earnestly beg it of him, we need not doubt of his faithfulness to perform and make good what he hath promised.

2. The other argument, which I shall principally insist upon, shall be from the comparison which our SAVIOUR here useth in the text, *If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?* This

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was a proverbial speech among the Jews, which seems from them to have been derived to the neighbour nations, as appears from that of Plautus, *Alterâ manu fert lapidem, alterâ panem ostentat*, he carries a stone in one hand, and holds forth bread in the other; *If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?* That is, if he ask that which is absolutely necessary, will he give him that which will do him no good? *Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?* *Or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?* That is, if he ask that, which though it be not absolutely necessary, yet may be very convenient; will he give him that which is hurtful and pernicious? Hardly any earthly parent, though otherwise never so bad, would deal thus with his children; and can we suspect it of God? Certainly it is much farther from him to deny to us, his children, those better and more necessary good things, which we humbly and heartily and earnestly beg of him, in a confident persuasion of his goodness.

If ye then being evil (many times bad enough in other respects, and at the best come infinitely short of God in point of benignity and goodness) *know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?*

This is a plain and undeniable argument, fitted to all capacities, because it proceeds upon two suppositions which every man must acknowledge to be true.

1. That earthly parents have generally such a natural affection for their children, as does strongly incline them to give them such good things, as are necessary and convenient for them, and which will not suffer them, instead of good things, to give them such things as either are no wise useful, or any wise hurtful to them; this is a matter of common, and certain, and sensible experience, which no man can deny.

2. The other supposition, which is as evident in reason, as the former is in experience, is this, that God is better than men, and that there is infinitely more goodness in him, than in the best man in the world, because goodness in its most exalted degree, and highest perfection,

perfection, is essential to that notion which all men have of God; and this being a common principle, in which men are universally agreed, no man can gainsay it.

Now let but these ~~two~~ things be supposed, that men, though otherwise evil, yet commonly have so much of natural goodness and affection for their children, as to be ready to give them those things which are good for them; and that God is infinitely more liberal and bountiful than men; and it will appear to be a thing highly credible, that this good God will not deny the best of gifts, even his holy spirit, to them that ask him.

But for the farther illustration of this argument, we will consider a little more particularly the terms of the comparison which our SAVIOUR here useth; our *earthly* and our *heavenly father*; *temporal* and *spiritual good things*.

1. Our *earthly* and our *heavenly father*, in which terms the givers are compared together. Now there are *three* considerations in a giver, which make him capable of being bountiful, and dispose him to it.

(1.) That he have wherewithal to be liberal, and can part with it, without damage and prejudice to himself.

(2.) That he be good-natured, and have a mind to give.

(3.) That he be related to those to whom he gives, and be concerned in their welfare. Now all these considerations are more eminently in God, and with far greater advantage than in any father upon earth. For,

(1.) God hath wherewithal to be liberal, and can confer what benefits he pleaseth, without any harm or prejudice to himself. Earthly parents cannot many times be so good to their children as they desire, because they have it not to bestow; they cannot perhaps feed them plentifully without pinching themselves, nor give them fit provision without impoverishing themselves. But the divine nature is a perpetual and inexhaustible spring of all

all good things, even of more than he can communicate ; in him are all the treasures of riches, and power, and wisdom, and he cannot by giving to others, ever empty or impoverish himself ; when he makes the freest communications of his goodness to his creatures, he does not thereby diminish and lessen his native store.

(2.) GOD hath infinitely more goodness than men, he hath stronger propensions and inclinations to do good, than are to be found in the best natured and most generous man in the world. All the goodness that is in the creature, is derived from GOD, who is the fountain and original of it, it is but an imperfect image, and imperfect representation of that excellency and perfection which the divine nature is possessed of in the highest degree that can be imagined. Men are many times *evil and envious* ; (for so the word signifies, *If ye being evil, πορνῶν, of an envious, niggardly, and illiberal disposition*) but at the best men are of a finite and limited goodness and perfection.

But now no such thing as envy and ill-will can possibly happen to GOD, who is so rich in his own native store, and so secure of the enjoyment of what he hath, that he can neither hope for the enlargement, nor fear the impairing of his estate.

(3.) GOD hath a nearer and more intimate relation to us, than our earthly parents, and is more concerned for our happiness. Our earthly parents are but the *fathers of our flesh*, as the apostle speaks, *Heb. xii. 9.* but GOD is *the father of our spirits*. Nay, in respect of our very bodies, GOD hath the greatest hand in framing of us ; it is he who *made us in secret, and curiously wrought us in the lowest parts of the earth : in his book all our members were written, which in continuance were fashioned*, *Psal. cxxxix. 15, 16.* so that we being GOD's creatures, our bodies the work of his hands, and our souls the breath of his mouth, GOD is more our father than he that begat us, and having a nearer and stronger relation to us, hath a greater care and concernment for our happiness.

So that if our *earthly parents*, who are many times indigent and ill-natured, and are but *the fathers of our flesh*, and that but as second causes in subordination to God, the principal author of our beings, I say, if they will *give good things to their children*; how much more shall our *heavenly father*, who is the fountain of all good, and goodness itself, who is our creator, the framer of our bodies, and *the father of our spirits*, be more ready to bestow on us the best things we can beg of him?

2. Let us compare likewise *temporal* and *spiritual good things*; in which terms you have the gifts compared together. Now there are *two* considerations belonging to a gift, which are apt to move and incline a person to bestow it; if it be such as is necessary, or very convenient for the person on whom it is bestowed; and if it be such as the person that bestows it takes great pleasure and delight in the imparting of it.

(1.) If it be such as is necessary, or very convenient for those on whom it is bestowed. Such is bread which earthly parents give their children; but that is only necessary to the body, and for the support of this frail and temporal life: but the holy spirit of God is necessary to the life and health of our souls, to our eternal life and happiness. Now our soul being our selves, and eternity the most considerable duration, God's holy spirit is consequently much more necessary and convenient for us, than any thing that our earthly parents can give us.

(2.) The spirit of God is such a gift as he takes the greatest pleasure and delight in the imparting and bestowing of it. What can be more acceptable to God, than that his children should be made partakers of his own divine nature, and conformed to his image; than that we should be *holy as God is holy*, and *renewed after the image of him that hath created us in righteousness and true holiness*? than that human nature should be restored to its primitive perfection and dignity, and recovered to that state in which it came out of God's hands? than to see the ruin and decay of his own
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workmanship repaired ; and his creatures, that were become miserable by the temptation of the devil, restored to happiness by the operation of the holy spirit of God ?

And this is the proper work of the spirit of God upon the minds of men, to sanctify and renew us, and (as the apostle expresseth it) *to create us again unto good works*, to make us *partakers of his own holiness*, and to restore our souls to that condition that *his soul may have pleasure in us*. What can we imagine more acceptable to God, than that men should be brought to this happy state and temper ? A child does not please his father so much when he desires to be instructed by him in learning and virtue, as we please God when we ask his holy spirit of him : for nothing can be more pleasing to him, than to bestow this best of gifts upon us.

So that the whole force of the argument comes to this, that if we believe that earthly parents have any good inclinations toward their children, and are willing to bestow upon them the necessities of life, we have much more reason to believe that God our heavenly father is much more ready *to give his holy spirit to them that ask him* ; whether we consider the quality of the giver, or the nature of the gift.

I should now have proceeded to the other particulars which I propounded ; but I shall only at present make some short reflections upon what hath already been delivered.

What a comfortable consideration is this, to be so fully assured of God's readiness to bestow all good things upon his children, and even his holy spirit, if we ask it of him ? and what an encouragement is here to constant and fervent prayer to God, who will not deny us the gift of his holy spirit, if we heartily and earnestly beg it of him ? and what an encouragement is here likewise to the resolutions and endeavours of a good life, that so powerful an assistance is so freely offered to us, to enable us to *run the ways of God's commandments* ; that God hath promised his holy spirit to reside and dwell in us, to be a principle of spiritual life to us, and to

enable us to all the purposes of obedience and a holy life ?

And what infinite cause have we to bless God for the gift of his holy spirit, and to say with St. Paul, *blessed be God for his unspeakable gift.* That he hath given his holy spirit to his church, at first in miraculous powers and gifts for the preaching of the christian religion in the world, and ever since in such degrees of assistance, as were necessary in the several ages of the church, for the preservation of the christian religion in the world ; that he hath given his holy spirit to every particular member of his church, for the sanctifying and renewing of our natures, *to strengthen us to every good word and work, and to keep us by his mighty power through faith unto salvation.*

And this sanctifying virtue of the Holy Ghost, enabling us to do the will of God, is more than any miraculous powers whatsoever. So our SAVIOUR tells us, *Matth. vii. 21, 22, 23. Not every one that saith unto me, LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, LORD, LORD, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* Men may do wonders by the power of the Holy Ghost, and yet be shut out of the kingdom of heaven ; only they that are assisted by the spirit of God to do the will of God, shall be admitted into heaven.

And this is matter of greater joy and comfort to us, than to work the greatest wonders, and to have power over devils, to cast them out of the bodies of men, *Luke x. 20. Rejoice not in this, saith our blessed SAVIOUR, that the spirits are made subject to you, but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.* How is that ? The sanctifying virtue of God's spirit is the *pledge* and *earnest* of our heavenly inheritance, and that whereby we are *sealed to the day of redemption.*

S E R M O N CCLIII.

The efficacy of prayer, for obtaining
the holy spirit.

St. LUKE xi. 13.

How much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?

The second sermon on this text.

IN discoursing on these words, I proposed,
First, to endeavour to shew what is comprehended in the gift of the holy spirit, mentioned in my text, and how great a blessing and benefit it is.

Secondly, what kind of asking is here required.

Thirdly, to confirm and illustrate the truth of this proposition, that God is very ready to give the holy spirit to them that ask him.

Fourthly, to remove a considerable objection, to which this discourse may seem liable. And,

Fifthly, to make some practical application of it to our selves.

The *three* former of these I have dispatched, and shall now proceed to the

Fourth thing which I propounded, which was to remove an objection to which this discourse may seem liable; the removal whereof will conduce very much to the clearing of this argument, about which men seem to have had very confused apprehensions. The objection is this; that none can ask the spirit aright, but they that have the spirit; and if this be so, then this large declaration of God's goodness and readiness to bestow his holy spirit upon them that ask him, comes to nothing;
for

for a promise signifies nothing, which confers a benefit on a person upon a condition impossible by him to be performed, unless he first have the benefit which is promised ; and to use a familiar comparison, if this were the meaning of it, it would be like a father's jesting with his child, when he is fallen, and bidding him come to him, and he will help him up. Now if God thus promise his holy spirit to them that ask it, with this reservation, that no man can ask God's spirit, unless he have it, then this promise amounts to nothing.

And that no man can ask God's spirit, without his spirit, (that is, put up any prayer that is acceptable to God, without the assistance of God's spirit) seems to me in effect generally granted by those who assert, that no unregenerate man can pray to God aright, or perform any other duties of religion in an acceptable manner : for to be unregenerate, and not to have the spirit of God, are equivalent expressions in scripture, St. Paul having expressly told us, that *if any man have not the spirit of God, he is none of his*, that is, does not belong to him, as every regenerate person most certainly does.

Besides that the scripture tells us, that all the prayers, and all the sacrifices, that is, all religious duties performed by a wicked man, are *an abomination to the Lord* ; because no prayer can be acceptable to God, which does not proceed from sincerity, and is not put up to God in faith ; now sincerity and faith are graces proper to the regenerate.

So that the objection in short is this, how can any man that hath not the spirit of God, ask any thing of God aright, that is, sincerely, fervently, and in faith ? And if without God's spirit, no man can beg his spirit of him, what then signifies this promise, that God *will give his holy spirit to them that ask him* ?

For the satisfaction of this objection, I shall lay down *these* propositions, which if they be well considered, will conduce very much to the clearing of this matter.

First, that in the interpretation of promises and conditions annexed to them, we ought above all things to
take

take heed, that we do not so interpret either the promise, or condition, as to make the promise void, and of none effect; for this cannot be done without a notorious affront to him that made the promise, who is presumed, if he was serious and sincere, to have intended a real benefit and advantage by his promise. And this rule holds not only in the interpretation of promises, but of all covenants and contracts; *in omni interpretatione pactorum, contractuum & promissorum, illud præcipue cavendum, ne in vanum recidant*; in the interpretation of all covenants, and contracts, and promises, we are principally to take care, that we do not so interpret them as to make them signify nothing: and if this hold among men, much more ought we to be cautious and tender of interpreting the promises of GOD to a vain and trifling sense; for we cannot dishonour the goodness and veracity of GOD more, than to suppose that he mocks men by his promises, and makes a shew and offer of a benefit, when he really intends none; for all such proceedings as would be unbecoming the sincerity and integrity of a good man, are to be removed at the greatest distance from GOD, *All whose ways are faithfulness and truth, who is not as man, that he should lie, or as the son of man, that he should repent.*

Secondly, I do not see but if this were the true sense and meaning of these words of our SAVIOUR, that though GOD *will give the holy spirit to them that ask him*, yet none but those who have the spirit of GOD, can ask it of him, I say, I do not see but that it must necessarily be granted, that such a promise as this amounts to nothing; because according to this interpretation of it, the benefit promised would be suspended upon a condition, which no man can perform, unless he be first partaker of the benefit; which is, in plain English, to promise to bestow a thing upon a man on this condition, that he first have the thing which I promise to bestow upon him, which signifies just nothing, but is lufory and trifling, and consequently not to be imagined to be the meaning of a divine promise. There cannot be a greater absurdity in divinity, than to put such a sense upon

on the promises of God, as does plainly evacuate them, and make them of none effect. This be far from us, as the apostle says, upon another occasion, *Shall we make the promises of God of none effect? God forbid.*

And whereas it is commonly said, that the meaning of our SAVIOUR's promise here in the text is this, that those who have the spirit of God already, if they ask a greater measure of it, he will not deny it to them; though this be true in it self, that God will not deny greater degrees of the grace and assistance of his holy spirit to them that beg it of him, and may by a just parity of reason be inferred from this promise, or contained in it as part of the meaning of it, yet to make this the whole meaning of it, seems to be a very forced and unreasonable limitation of these general words, wherein this promise is conceived; for if we look back to the 10th verse, the words are as general as could well be devised, *Every one that asketh, receiveth; and every one that seeketh, findeth*; and containing matter of favour and benefit they ought in reason to be enlarged and extended as far as may be, but by no means to be restrained without evident reason. Now so far is there from being any evident reason for this, that there seems to me to be an invincible one to the contrary, why they should not be thus restrained, and that is this. If this promise of our SAVIOUR's were thus to be limited; then all other promises of the like nature, ought in like manner to be interpreted; which cannot be without manifest violence and self-contradiction. I will instance in two other promises of the like nature and importance. The first is Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. God there promises to reclaim them from their idolatry, by convincing them of their sin, and giving them repentance, and his holy spirit to regenerate and sanctify them, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an*
heart

heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. Now that which I would argue from hence, is this ; those idolatrous Jews to whom God promises that he will cleanse them, and give them a new heart, and a new spirit, and put his spirit into them, were as yet unregenerate, and consequently, as the objection supposeth, could not pray for these blessings, nor ask them of God in a right manner ; and yet he suspends these blessings upon the condition of their praying for them, as is evident, *ver. 37. Thus saith the LORD GOD, I will yet be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.* From whence it is plain, that God would not bestow these blessings upon them, without their seeking to him for them. Now if these persons, because they were unregenerate, could not pray for these things, then these promises signified nothing ; which is by no means to be imagined of the promises of God. So that it is clear, that the spirit of God is here promised to the unregenerate, upon condition of their suing to God for it ; and if so, there can be no reason to restrain the promise in the text, which is of the same nature, and made upon the same condition, to the regenerate only.

The other text I shall mention, is *Jam. i. 5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him.* In which words, St. James, under the notion of *wisdom* (as I told you before) doth comprehend all the fruits of the spirit, which are the effect of regeneration and sanctification. Now this promise being conceived in so general terms, cannot without manifest force and violence be restrained only to the regenerate : for then the promise should not have run thus, *If any man lack wisdom ; but, If any man have this spiritual wisdom already, let him ask more of God.* You see then what reason there is, why this promise of God's holy spirit should be understood in the latitude wherein it is expressed, and not restrained to the regenerate only.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, if by *having the spirit of God*, be understood the general and common influence of God's spirit upon the minds of men, whereby they are quickened and excited to their duty ; I grant that no man that hath not the spirit of God in this sense, can pray to God, or acceptably perform any other duty of religion : and this assertion is very agreeable to the phrase and language of the holy scriptures, which attribute all good motions and actions to the spirit of God working in us, and assisting us ; and in this sense unregenerate men are under the influence of God's spirit, or else they could not be said to resist it : but they have not the spirit of God *dwelling in them*, which is the most proper sense of *having the spirit of God*, in which sense the apostle says, *If any man have not the spirit of CHRIST, he is none of his* : but then it is specially to be noted, that the common and transient operation of God's spirit, which is preparatory to conversion and regeneration, and whereby God works in men a sense of sin, and some inclination and disposition to goodness, is by our SAVIOUR peculiarly attributed to the father, as his proper work, in which sense our SAVIOUR says, *John vi. 44. No man can come to me, except the father, which hath sent me, draw him. Ver. 45. Every man therefore that hath heard, and learned of the father, cometh unto me.* Now men are said to *learn of the father*, and to *be drawn by him*, by those preparatory dispositions for the receiving of the christian religion, which were wrought in men by that natural sense of good and evil, which they have by the law of nature, which is properly the dispensation of the father, as being the immediate effect of God's creation, as a late judicious writer hath very well observed, and more largely explained.

Fourthly, but if by *having the spirit of God*, be meant the special effect of regeneration and sanctification, and the permanent influence and constant residence of God's holy spirit in good men, then I make no doubt to say, that those who have not the spirit of God in this sense, may ask his spirit of him ; that is, those who are not yet

yet regenerate and sanctified, may in an acceptable manner pray to God to give them his holy Spirit, to the purposes of sanctification and perseverance in goodness; and they may ask this of God sincerely, earnestly, and in faith, which are the qualifications of an acceptable prayer. And this I think may be evidently made appear, both from scripture, and by good consequence from the confessions of all sorts of divines.

1. From scripture. It is plain that wicked and unregenerate men are commanded and required to pray to this purpose. Not to mention the general commands concerning prayer, which do certainly oblige unregenerate men, I will produce one plain and undeniable instance, *Acts viii. 22, 23.* where St. Peter directs Simon Magus, whom he expressly declares to be in an unregenerate state, to pray to God for the pardon of his great sin, which certainly he would not have done, had he thought an unregenerate man could not pray in an acceptable manner; because his counsel would have been to no purpose: but it is plain that St. Peter was so far from thinking that an unregenerate man could not pray acceptably to God, that he gives this as a reason why he should pray; because he was unregenerate; *Pray to God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee: for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

2. This will appear farther by clear consequence, from the concessions of all sorts of divines, and principles granted on all hands.

1. 'Tis universally granted, that it is a thing very pleasing and acceptable to God, that men should pray to be regenerate and sanctified; so that the matter of this prayer is unquestionably acceptable.

2. It is likewise granted on all hands, that before a man is regenerate and sanctified, he must be made sensible of his evil and sinful state, and of his great need of God's grace and Spirit, and that God's Spirit is able to work this change in him, and that it is the will of God that he should be regenerated and sanctified.

3. It is likewise generally granted, that these preparatory works of regeneration, these beginnings of our

repentance and turning to God, and all desires and endeavours to that purpose, are acceptable to God.

Now from these concessions it plainly follows, that an unregenerate man may pray to God acceptably for his holy Spirit, to regenerate and sanctifie him. For,

1. The matter of his prayer is very acceptable to God, according to the first concession.

2. The manner of it may be acceptable, because an unregenerate man may pray for this sincerely, with earnestness, and in faith: sincerely, because he may put up this prayer to God, out of a true sense of his miserable and sinful state, and his great need of God's grace and holy Spirit; and he that is truly sensible of this, cannot dissemble with God, he cannot but be very real and sincere in this request: and this sense of his condition, and the need of what he asks, will make him earnest and importunate: and he may pray in faith, that is, not doubting but that God is able and willing to grant him what he asks, because he may be convinced that the Spirit is able to work this change in him, and that this is the will of God, that he should be regenerated and sanctified, according to the second concession.

3. There's no reason to think that God will not accept such a prayer as this; because these preparative works of regeneration, viz. a sense of our sinful state, and of our need of God's grace and Spirit, and earnest desires and prayers for these, are acceptable to God, according to the third concession. So that now I hope this objection, which hath been so troublesome to many, is fully satisfied.

As for those texts where it is said, that *the prayers and be sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord*, I shall briefly return this answer, that these texts are not to be understood of a wicked and unregenerate man, simply as such, but as resolved to continue such. And thus Solomon elsewhere in the Proverbs explains what he means by a wicked man, *Prov. xxviii. 9. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.* So that the wicked man, whose prayer is an abomination, is such an one as is obstinately and resolvedly

solv'dly disobedient, such an one as *turneth away his ear from hearing the law*. And David much to the same purpose, *Psal. l. 15, 16, 17. Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorifie me. But unto the wicked GOD saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.* Such wicked men as will not be reclaimed, what have they to do to pray, or perform any other act of religion? Nothing that they do, whilst such, can be acceptable to GOD. And to the same sense David says elsewhere, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear my prayer.* GOD will reject the prayers of the best men, if they retain a secret love to any sin.

If it be yet farther objected, that unregenerate men are out of CHRIST, in and through whom we are accepted: To this I answer, that those only who are in CHRIST, are in a state of perfect acceptance with GOD: but the beginning of this state, and all tendency towards it, such as is hearty and earnest prayer to GOD for his holy Spirit to regenerate and sanctifie us, have their degrees of acceptance from their relation to the perfect state whereof they are the beginnings, and toward which they tend: for by the same reason that a regenerate state is acceptable to GOD, all the beginnings of it, and preparations to it are proportionably acceptable; the degrees of acceptance being proportionable to the difference which is between the beginning of a thing, and the perfection of it.

Having thus endeavour'd to clear this truth, I come in the

Fifth and last place, to make some brief application of it to our selves.

1. This is matter of great encouragement to us, under the sense of our own weakness and impotency. When we consider the corruption of our nature, the strength of our lusts, and the malice and power of the devil, and compare our weakness with the strength of those mighty enemies of our souls, we are apt to despond in our minds, and our hearts are ready to fail within us; like the peo-

ple of Israel, when they heard the report of the spies, concerning the strength of the land which they were to conquer, and the terror of the inhabitants, they with themselves almost dead, for fear of death; *Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt; or would to God we had died in the wilderness. Wherefore hath the LORD brought us into this land, to fall by the sword? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? Numb. xiv. 2, &c.* Thus we are apt to be dishearten'd when we look only to our selves, and consider the power of our enemies; but when we look beyond our selves, as Caleb and Joshua did, to that presence and strength of God, which was promised to go along with them; if we would but consider those gracious and powerful assistances of God's holy Spirit, which are offer'd to us, and are ready to join with us in this holy warfare of fighting against sin, and subduing and mortifying our lusts, we should then encourage our selves as they did, *Fear ye not the people of the land: for they are bread for us, their defence is departed from them; the LORD is with us, fear them not, Numb. xiv. 9.* If we would but apply our selves to God for the aids of his grace and holy Spirit, and make use of that assistance which he offers, we should (as the Apostle speaks in another case, *Heb. xi. 34.*) *out of weakness be made strong, wax valiant in fight, and be able to put to flight the armies of aliens.* If we would but wisely consider our own strength, *How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?* All our spiritual enemies would quail before us, and as 'tis said of the Canaanites, *Josh. v. 1. Their hearts would melt, and there would be no more spirit left in them.* 2 Kings vi. 15. when Elisha's servant saw an host, compassing the city of Samaria with horses and chariots, he was in great fear and perplexity, and said, *Master, what shall we do?* but when upon Elisha's prayer, *The LORD had opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold the mountains were full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha;* then he took heart, and his fears vanish'd, because *those that were with them were more than they that were against them.* Thus, if our eyes were opened by faith, to discern those invisible aids and assistances which stand by us, how should

this

this raise our courage and our confidence, and make us to triumph with the apostle, *Rom. viii. 31.* *If God be for us, who can be against us?* and to rebuke our fears, and the despondency of our spirits, as David does, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Trust still in God:* and to say with him, when *multitudes of enemies compass us about, In the name of the LORD we will destroy them.* *Eph. vi. 10.* when the apostle represents to the Christians what enemies they had to contest withal, *we fight not only against flesh and blood;* that is, not only against men who persecute us; but against devils, who continually infest and tempt us, *against principalities and powers, &c.* he encourageth them against all these, by the strength of **GOD**; *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the LORD, and in the power of his might.* Thus we should encourage our selves in **GOD**, and animate our resolutions from the consideration of **GOD**'s holy Spirit, *that Spirit of might and of power,* which **GOD** is ready to give to every one of us, to assist us to do whatever he requires of us. And we have no reason to complain of weakness, so long as the strength of **GOD** stands by us, and the powerful aids of **GOD**'s Spirit are ready to join themselves to us.

2. Let us earnestly beg of **GOD** his holy Spirit, seeing it is so necessary to us, and **GOD** is so ready to bestow this best of gifts upon us. Bread is not more necessary to the support of our natural life, than the holy Spirit of **GOD** is to our spiritual life and strength: and there is no father upon earth more ready to give bread to his children that cry after him, than **GOD** is to give his holy Spirit to those who heartily and earnestly beg it of him. Did we but know how great a gift the Spirit of **GOD** is, and how necessary to us, we would not lose such a blessing, for want of asking: but we would be importunate with **GOD**, and give him no rest, ask, and seek, and knock, and address our selves to him with all earnestness, and never give over till our desires were granted.

3. Let us take heed of *grieving the Spirit of God*, and provoking him to withdraw himself from us. As **GOD** is very ready to give his Spirit to us, so we should give the

best entertainment we can to so great a guest, lest we give him cause to take away his holy Spirit from us. And there are two things chiefly which provoke God hereto.

(1.) If we resist and quench the motions of his Spirit, and be incompassionate to the dictates and suggestions of it; We affront the Spirit of God which is given us for our guidance and direction, when we will not be ruled, and governed, and led by it; we thrust the Spirit of God out of his office, and make his presence useless and unnecessary to us; and this causeth him to go away grieved from us.

(2.) If we harbour and entertain any thing that is of a contrary quality and nature to him, and inconsistent with him; and of such a nature is every lust and corruption that is cherish'd in our souls. The Spirit of God is the best friend in the world: but as friends have the most tender resentments of unkind usage, so the Spirit of God is of a most tender and delicate sense, and cannot bear unkindness, especially such an unkindness, as to take in to him the greatest enemy he hath in the world: for there is no such strong antipathy in nature, as there is between sin, and the holy Spirit of God. The Spirit of God cannot endure to dwell in an impure soul. If we would have the Spirit of God abide with us, we must give no entertainment to any lust, we must banish the love of all sin for ever out of our hearts: for if we harbour any lust in our bosom, it will be to us, as Dalilah was to Sampson, it will insensibly *reave us of our strength? the Spirit of God will depart from us, and we shall be like other men.*

4. And lastly, God's readiness to afford the grace and assistance of his holy Spirit to us, to enable us to the performance of our duty, and the obedience of his laws, makes all wilful sin and disobedience inexcusable. Let us not pretend any longer the impossibility, or insuperable difficulty of our duty, when so powerful an assistance is offered to us. If any man come short of happiness for want of performing the conditions of the gospel, it is by his own wilful fault and negligence; because he would not beg God's grace, and because he would not make use of it. If any man be wicked, and continue in a sinful course, it is not for want of power, but of will to do better.

better. GOD is always before-hand with us in the offers of his grace and assistance, and is wanting to no man in that which is necessary to make him good and happy. No man shall be able to plead at the day of judgment want of power to have done his duty: for GOD *will judge the world in righteousness*; and then I am sure he will condemn no man, for not having done that which was impossible for him to do. GOD hath done enough to every man to leave him without excuse. St. Paul tells us, that the blind heathens should have no apology to make for themselves. Next to the being of GOD, and his goodness, and justice, I do as verily believe it, as I do any thing in the world, that no man shall be able to say to GOD at the great day, LORD, I would have repented of my sins, and obeyed thy laws, but I wanted power to do it; I was left destitute of the grace which was necessary to the performance and discharge of my duty; I did earnestly beg thy holy Spirit, but thou didst deny me. No man shall have the face to say this to GOD at the great day; every man's conscience will then acquit GOD, and lay all the fault upon his own folly and neglect: for then *every mouth shall be stopped, and GOD shall be justified in his saying, and overcome when we are judged.*

S E R M O N CCLIV.

The bad and the good use of God's
signal judgments upon others.

St. LUKE xiii. 5.

I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

THE occasion of these words you have at the beginning of the chapter; *There were present at that season* (says the evangelist) *some that told our SAVIOUR of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

sacrifices. These in all probability were some of the faction of Judas Gaulonita, who about that time, as Josephus tells us, had stirred up the Galileans to a sedition against the Roman government, under a pretence of asserting their liberty, by freeing themselves from the Roman tribute; and some of these, coming to Jerusalem to sacrifice, (as the custom of the Jews was, especially at the time of the passover) Pilate caused them to be slain upon the place, while they were at this service, shedding their blood with that of the beasts, which were killed for sacrifice. The report of this prophane cruelty being brought to our SAVIOUR, he (as his custom was in all his conversation, to raise some useful meditation from such occurrences that happen'd, and to turn them to a spiritual advantage) takes occasion from the relation of this sad accident, to correct a very vitious humour, which hath always reigned in the world, of censuring the faults of others, whilst we overlook our own.

The principle of self-love, which was planted in innocent nature, is by the fall and corruption of man degenerated into self-flattery; so that it is now almost become natural to men, to supply the want of a good conscience, by a good conceit of themselves. Hence it comes to pass that men are so ready to take all advantages to confirm themselves in that false peace which they have created to themselves in their own imaginations; and so they can but maintain a comfortable opinion of themselves, they matter not how uncharitable they are to others; and knowing no better way to countenance this fond conceit of themselves, than by fancying God to be their friend, hence it comes to pass, that they are so apt to interpret the several providences of God towards others, in favour of themselves; and to abuse the judgments of God, which fall upon their neighbours, into an argument of their own comparative innocency.

And therefore our SAVIOUR (who knew what was in man, and what kind of conclusions men are apt to draw from such occurrences of providence as this which was now presented) endeavours in the first place to prevent the bad use they were likely to make of it; *Suppose ye,* (say

he) *that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things. I tell you, nay, &c.* To this instance of the Galileans he adds another of the same kind, well known to all that dwelt in Jerusalem, and that was of the eighteen persons, who were slain by the fall of a tower, which was in the pool of Siloam at the foot of mount Sion, verse the 4th, *or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, think ye that they were sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay.*

And having thus anticipated their censuring of others, our SAVIOUR proceeds to awaken them to a consideration and care of themselves, *I tell you, nay: but except you repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

The general sense of which words is, that impenitency in sin will certainly be the ruin of men sooner or later: it will probably bring great mischiefs and calamities upon men in this world; however, it will infallibly plunge them into misery in the next. But besides the certain denunciation of misery and ruin to all impenitent sinners, which is the largest sense of the words, and agreeable to many other express texts of scripture, it is probable enough, that they may more immediately and particularly refer to those temporal calamities which were to befall the Jews, and be spoken by our SAVIOUR by way of prediction, foretelling what would be the fate of the whole Jewish nation, if they continued impenitent, πάντες ὁμοίως ἀπολείσθε, *Ye shall all perish in like manner;* that is, if ye do not repent, besides the vengeance of another world, a temporal judgment as sad as these I have instanced in, and not much unlike them, shall come upon this whole nation: and so indeed it came to pass afterwards. For Josephus tells us, that at the time of the passover, when the whole nation of the Jews were met together, as their custom was, at Jerusalem, they were all shut up and besieged by the Romans; and he tells us farther, that in the time of that siege, upon a sedition among themselves, a great multitude of them were slain in the temple, as they were sacrificing, and their blood poured forth, together with that of the beasts which were to be offered, as had happened before to the Galileans.

From

From the words thus explained, I shall observe these two things.

First, the wrong use which men are apt to make of the extraordinary and signal judgments of GOD upon others. *Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?* intimating, that men are very apt so to conclude, and that the Jews did so.

Secondly, the right use that we should make of these things, which is, to reflect upon our own sins, and repent of them, lest the like or greater judgments overtake us. *I tell you, nay : but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

First, the wrong use which men are apt to make of the extraordinary and signal judgments of GOD upon others; and that is, to be uncharitable and censorious towards others, which is commonly consequent upon a gross and stupid neglect of ourselves. For men do not usually entertain and cherish this censorious humour for its own sake, but in order to some farther end; they are not so uncharitable merely out of spite and malice to others, but out of self-flattery and a fond affection to themselves. This makes them forward to represent others to all the disadvantage that may be, and to render them as bad as they can, that they themselves may appear less evil in their own eyes, and may have a colour to set off themselves by the comparison. It is the nature of guilt to flee from itself, and to use all possible arts to hide and lessen it. For guilt in the soul is like deformity in the body. Persons very deformed seldom arrive to that absurd conceit of themselves, as to think themselves beauties; but because they cannot think so, they do all they can to comfort and commend themselves by comparison. Hence men are apt to censure and aggravate the faults and mis-carriages of their neighbours, that their own may appear the less; for a lesser evil in respect of a greater, hath some face and appearance of good; and therefore men are ready to take all advantages to represent others as bad as may be: and because there can be no greater evidence that a man is a great sinner, than if he be declared to be

from heaven, hence it is, that men are so forward to interpret the remarkable judgments of God upon any person, as an argument of his being a more notorious offender than others.

For the farther explication and illustration of this point, I shall do these three things.

I. I shall shew that men are very apt to make this bad use of the signal judgments of God upon others.

II. I shall more particularly consider several of the rash conclusions which men are apt to draw from the judgments of God upon others; whether upon publick societies and communities of men, or upon particular persons.

III. I shall shew how unreasonable it is to draw from hence any such rash and uncharitable conclusions concerning others, and likewise how foolish it is from hence to draw comfort and encouragement to ourselves.

I. That men are very apt to make this bad use of the signal judgments of God upon others. This our SAVIOUR plainly intimates in the text, *Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, think ye that they were sinners above all that dwell in Jerusalem?* By which manner of speaking, our SAVIOUR signifies, that men are very apt thus to suppose, that those upon whom the extraordinary judgments of God fall, are no ordinary sinners, but are guilty of somewhat above the common rate of men.

Thus we find Job's friends, when they saw him afflicted by the hand of God, in so strange and extraordinary a manner, from hence presently concluded, he must needs be a prodigious sinner; and because they could find no evidence of this in his life and actions, therefore they concluded that his wickedness was secret, and that it lay there where they could not see it, in his heart and thoughts: for this they laid down for a certain conclusion, that being so remarkable a sufferer, he must needs be a great sinner; and because they could discern no such thing in his outward conversation, they charged him with hypocrisy, and concluded all his external profession of piety and religion, to be false and counterfeit.

So likewise, when the man that was born blind was brought to our SAVIOUR, *John ix. 2.* the disciples presently ask'd him, *Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?* This was that which lay uppermost in their minds, the very first thing that suggested itself to their thoughts; surely this judgment was inflicted upon this man for some particular and extraordinary sin, which either he, or (because that was not so likely) his parents had been guilty of.

And we find in common experience, how prone men are to make uncharitable constructions of the judgments of GOD upon others, and grievously to censure those whom GOD hath smitten; partly because it looks like a vindication of themselves from the guilt of the like crimes, since they are not involved in the like sufferings; partly to gratifie their pride and curiosity, in seeming to understand the reason and end of GOD's judgments, as if they had been of his council, and saw farther into the reasons of his providence than other men; like some pragmatistical people in civil matters, who tho' they think no more than their neighbours, yet will needs seem to understand those hidden and secret springs which move publick affairs: and which is yet worse, many times to gratifie their own passions, and foolish conceits, that GOD is angry with those things and persons which displease them, and that GOD's judgments are expressions of his particular dislike of those whom they disaffect, and would certainly punish, if the government of the world were in their hands. Or lastly, men think it a piece of piety, and affectionate zeal for GOD, and a taking of his part, to censure those heavily, whom GOD afflicts severely; like some foolish parasites, who if they see a great man be angry with any one and strike him, they think themselves bound to fall upon him, and out of an officious flattery will beat him too. But from whatever cause it proceeds, it is certainly a very bad thing, and our SAVIOUR here in the text does with great vehemency deny, that any such conclusion can certainly be collected from the judgments of GOD upon others; *I tell you, nay.* And to express this more vehemently, he repeats it again; *I tell you, nay.* Let us therefore;

II. More

II. More particularly consider some of the rash conclusions, which men are apt to draw from the judgments of God upon others, whether upon publick societies and communities of men, or upon particular persons.

I. It is rash, where there is no divine revelation in the case, to be peremptory as to the particular sin or kind of it, so as to say, that for such a sin God sent such a judgment upon a particular person, or upon a company of men, unless the judgment be a natural effect and consequent of such a sin; as if a drunken man die of a surfeit, or a lewd person of a disease that is the proper effect of such a vice, or if the punishment ordained by law for such a crime overtake the offender; in these and such like cases, it is neither rash nor uncharitable, to say, such a mischief befel a man for such a fault; because such an evil is evidently the effect of such a sin: but in other cases, peremptorily to conclude, is great rashness. Thus the heathen of old laid all those fearful judgments of God, which fell upon the Roman empire in the first ages of christianity, upon the Christians, as if they had been sent by God on purpose to testify his displeasure against that new sect of religion. And thus every party deals with those that are opposite to them, out of a fond persuasion that God is like themselves, and that he cannot but hate those whom they hate, and punish those whom they would punish, if the sway and government of things were permitted to them.

Thus the papists, on the one hand, attribute all the judgments of God upon this nation, the confusion and distractions of so many years, and those later judgments wherewith God hath visited us in so dreadful a manner, to our schism and heresie, as the proper cause of them: (for so they call our reformation of ourselves from their errors and corruptions) but to what cause then will they ascribe the great felicity of queen Elizabeth's long reign, and the peace of king James his reign? And then on the other hand, some of the dissenters from our church are wont to ascribe these calamities to a quite different cause, that our reformation hath not gone far enough from the church of Rome. It is hard to say which of these conclusions is most rash and unreasonable; I wish other reasons of these calamities were

not too visible and notorious ; the horrible impiety and wickedness which abounds and reigns amongst us.

2. It is rash likewise for any man, without revelation, to conclude peremptorily, that **GOD** must needs in his judgments only have respect to some late and fresh sins, which were newly committed, and that all his arrows are only levelled against those impieties of men which are now upon the stage, and in present view. This is rash and groundless ; and men herein take a measure of **GOD** by themselves, and because they are mightily affected with the present, and sensible of a fresh provocation, and want to revenge themselves while the heat is upon them ; therefore they think **GOD** must do so too. But there is nothing occasions more mistakes in the world about **GOD** and his providence, than to bring him to our standard, and to measure his thoughts by our thoughts ; and the ways and methods of his providence, by our ways. Justice in **GOD** is a wise, and calm, and steady principle, which as to the time and circumstances of its exercise, is regulated by his wisdom. Past and present, are very material differences to us ; but they signifie little to **GOD**, whose vast and comprehensive understanding takes in all differences of time, and looks upon them at one view ; so that when the judgments of **GOD** follow the sins of men at a great distance, *GOD is not slack, as men count slackness ; for a thousand years are in his sight but as one day, and one day as a thousand years ;* as the apostle reasons about this very case I am now speaking of, *2 Pet. iii. 8.*

And to convince men of their error and mistake in this particular, the scripture hath given us many instances to the contrary, that the justice of **GOD** hath many times a great retrospection, and punisheth the sins of men a long time after the commission of them. This he threatens in the second commandment, *To visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him.* Thus we find he dealt with Ahab, *He did not bring the evil in his days, but in his sons days he brought it upon his house,* the first of *Kings* xxi. 29. So likewise we find, *2 Sam. xxi.* **GOD** brought three years famine upon Israel in the days of David, for a national

sin committed in Saul's reign; namely, for the cruelty exercised upon the Gibeonites, contrary to the publick faith of the nation given to them. So likewise the extirpation of the Amorites, and the other inhabitants of Canaan, was not a judgment inflicted by GOD upon them, only for the sins of that present age, but for the iniquity which had been many ages in filling up, as may plainly be collected from the expression, *Gen. xv. 16. The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full*, which was spoken four or five generations before they were rooted out. And so also our SAVIOUR tells us, that *the blood of all the prophets and righteous men which had been shed in all ages, should come upon that generation*.

Nay, if this were not so, *How should GOD judge the world?* And if it be consistent with the justice of GOD, to respite the greatest part of the punishment of sinners to another world; then certainly he may, without any imputation of injustice, defer the punishment of sin in this world.

3. It is rash to conclude from little circumstances of judgments, or some fanciful parallel betwixt the sin and the punishment, what sinners and what persons in particular GOD designed to punish by such a calamity. There is scarce any thing betrays men more to rash and ungrounded censures and determinations concerning the judgments of GOD, than a superstitious observation of some little circumstances belonging to them, and a conceit of a seeming parallel between such a sin, and such a judgment.

This was the ground of Shimei's rash determination concerning David, and what particular sin of his it was, for which GOD permitted his son Absalom to rise up in rebellion against him, 2 Sam. xvi. 8. *The LORD hath returned upon thee* (says he) *all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned, and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son; and behold thou art taken in thy own mischief*. Here seemed to be as handsom a parallel between this misfortune which befel David, and his carriage towards the house of Saul, as can easily happen in any judgment. David had carried away the kingdom from the family of Saul his father-in-law;

and now by the providence of **GOD**, David's own son Absalom seems to be stirred up to supplant his father, and to ravish the kingdom out of his hands; the suitability of the judgment to the supposed sin of David, would tempt any man that had the curiosity to pry into the judgments of **GOD**, and a fancy apt to be pleased with parallels, to have look'd upon this censure of Shimei, as not without ground: for though David was in no fault, as to Saul's house, tho' in truth and reality he had the best title to the kingdom that could be, it being disposed to him by **GOD**'s appointment; yet because Samuel's anointing him to be king was a thing privately done, and so might not either be publickly known, or not publickly believed, there seems to be a very fair colour and pretence for this censure of Shimei.

And therefore methinks the consideration of this one instance should very much deter wise men from peremptory conclusions concerning the judgments of **GOD**, upon such slight grounds as a supposed parallel between the sin and the punishment: and yet we find all sorts of men very superstitiously affected this way; all parties are very greedy to catch at any shadow of a parallel, between the judgments which befall their enemies, and the sins which they suppose them to be guilty of, and are apt to cry up such things as evident testimonies from heaven of **GOD**'s displeasure against those, whom they have a mind to make odious.

In the beginning of the reformation, when Zuinglius was slain in a battel by the papists, and his body burnt, his heart was found entire in the ashes; from whence (saith the historian) his enemies concluded the obduracy of his heart; but his friends, the firmness and sincerity of it in the true religion. Both these censures seem to be built upon the same ground of fancy and imagination: but it is a wise and well-grounded observation, which Thuanus the historian, (who was himself of the Roman communion) makes upon it, *Adeo turbatis odio aut amore animis, ut sit in Religionis dissentionibus, pro se quisque omnia superstitiosè interpretatur*: Thus (says he) mens minds being prejudiced before-hand by love or hatred (as it commonly

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falls out in differences of religion) each party superstitiously interprets the little circumstances of every event in favour of it self. Every thing hath two handles; and a good wit and a strong imagination may find something in every judgment, whereby he may with some appearance of reason turn the cause of the judgment upon his adversary. Fancy is an endless thing; and if we will go this way to work, then he that hath the best wit, is like to be the best interpreter of GOD's judgments.

I do not deny, (as I touch'd before) but where the sin is evident, and the punishment is the genuine product and natural effect of the sin, we may, without uncharitableness, ascribe the punishment to the sin, as the particular cause of it; as sickness to intemperance, and poverty to sloth and prodigality: or if a judgment be remarkably inflicted upon a person, in the very act of some notorious sin: or if when a person hath been guilty of a sin, which is unquestionably so, and out of all controverſie, if afterwards a judgment befall that person, which carries the very signature of the sin upon it; as when the dogs lick'd Ahab's blood, in the very same place where he had shed the blood of Naboth; in these and the like cases, a man may without rashness and uncharitableness fix the cause of such a judgment upon such a sin, but then, as I said before, the sin must be very evident and out of dispute; and the punishment must carry so plain a mark and signature upon it, as without straining, and the help of fancy, is obvious to every one's observation.

And yet, even in these cases, the party himself upon whom the judgment falls may better make the interpretation, than a by-stander: and therefore the scripture, as it is in all other things very instructive, so particularly in this matter it observes this decorum, not to bring in others making interpretations of the judgments of GOD, but the persons themselves, upon whom the judgments fall. Thus Adonibezek, *Judges* i. 6, 7. when the men of Judah had taken him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes, the scripture does not bring in others making censure and interpretation of this judgment of GOD upon him; but brings him in making this reflection upon

himself; *Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs, and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me.* So likewise Jacob's sons, when they were brought into trouble in Egypt, about their brother Benjamin, they presently reflect upon their sin against their brother Joseph, Gen. xlii. 21, 22. *They said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not bear: therefore is this distress come upon us. Therefore behold also his blood is required.* They took notice of the resemblance betwixt the sin and the punishment; they had sinned concerning their brother, and they were punish'd in a brother.

4. It is rash likewise to determine any thing concerning the end and consequence of GOD's judgments. Commonly all parties that are down are apt to sooth and flatter themselves, that GOD intends by such and such judgments upon their adversaries, to make way for the restoration of their own sect, and the restitution of those things which they desire. Others, who are more melancholy and concerned, are apt to look upon the worst side of things, and to imagine dreadful and dismal consequences. But it is a fond thing for us to pretend to know the secret ends and designs of the divine providence: for sometimes GOD makes one calamity the forerunner of another; and sometimes again his omnipotent wisdom forceth good out of evil, and makes a great judgment in the issue to turn to a mighty blessing.

Jacob thought the loss of his son Joseph, one of the greatest calamities that could have befallen him, when it was the greatest mercy to his family that could be: for in truth the providence of GOD sent him as an harbinger into Egypt, to provide for his father and his family.

'Tis observed by the wise author of the history of the council of Trent, that when Zuinglius and OEcolumpadius, the two chief protestant ministers among the Swisses, dyed, within few days of one another, the papists interpreted this to signifie GOD's design to restore their former religion to them, in that he had taken away at once the two great pillars and supports of the protestant cause.

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upon which the author makes this wise observation: Certainly, says he, *it is a pious thought to attribute the disposal of all events to the providence of GOD: but to determine to what end these events are directed by that high wisdom, is not far from presumption.* Men are so religiously wedded to their own opinions, that they are persuaded, that GOD loves and favours them, as much as they themselves do. But, says he, *the things which happen'd afterwards, did confute this presumption; for the protestant doctrine made a much speedier progress after their death, than it had done before.* We think that a cause must needs sink, when some great supports of it are taken away: but GOD stands in need of no man; he can raise up new instruments, or carry on his own design by the weakest and most unlikely means.

5. And lastly, it is rashness to determine that those persons, or that part of the community upon which the judgments of GOD do particularly fall, are greater sinners than the rest, who are untouch'd by it. And this is the very case our SAVIOUR instanceth here in the text, *Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay.* And this brings me to the

III. Particular I propos'd, which was to shew how unreasonable it is for men to draw any such uncharitable conclusions from the judgments of GOD upon others, that they are greater sinners than others; and likewise how foolish it is from hence to take any comfort and encouragement to ourselves, and because we escape those calamities which have befallen others, therefore we are better than they. Our SAVIOUR vehemently denies, that either of these conclusions can justly be made from the remarkable judgments of GOD, which befall others, and pass by us; *I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

I. It is very unreasonable for men to draw any such uncharitable conclusions concerning others, that because the judgments of GOD fall upon them, that therefore they are greater sinners than others. For,

I. What

1. What do we know, but that **GOD** may inflict those evils upon those particular persons for secret ends and reasons, only known to his own infinite wisdom, and fit to be concealed from us? What do we know but he may afflict such a person in a remarkable manner, purely in the use of his sovereignty, without any special respect to the sins of such a person, as being greater than the sins of other men; but yet for some great end, very worthy of his wisdom and goodness? As for the trial of such a man's faith, and of his exemplary patience and submission to the will of **GOD**, it pleaseth **GOD** to set him up for a mark, and to suffer many and sharp arrows to be shot at him, to try whether his faith and patience be proof; as men set up armour and shoot at it with a double charge, not with a design to hurt it, but to prove and praise it.

We are assured that the goodness of **GOD** is such, that had it not been for sin, we had never known affliction, nor been exercised with it; but now, that we have all sinned, and upon a common account are all liable to the justice of **GOD**, he may single out from this common herd of sinners whom he pleaseth, to smite with his judgments, and for what end he pleaseth; and therefore when **GOD** at any time lets fly an arrow at a particular person, this only signifies at the utmost that he is a sinner in general, but no man can from hence with any certainty conclude, that this man is a greater sinner than other men.

And this is very plain from those instances I have had occasion before to mention; the instance of **Job**, whom **GOD** afflicted in a most terrible manner, for the trial of his faith and patience, and to furnish all ages with a standing and glorious example of so great and necessary a virtue: and from the instance of the man in the gospel that was born blind; concerning whom, our **SAVIOUR** expressly declares, that this judgment did not befall this man for any particular or remarkable sin, which either this man or his parents had been guilty of above others, but that the glorious power of **GOD** might be manifested in his miraculous cure, *John ix. 3. Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of GOD should be made manifest in him.*

2. What

2. What do we know but that GOD may send these calamities upon some particular persons, in mercy to the generality; and upon some particular places in a nation, out of kindness to the whole? When wickedness has overspread a nation, and is grown universal, if out of this herd of sinners, the justice of GOD please to single out some few persons, and to chase them and hunt them down for terror to the rest, that others *may bear, and fear, and take warning*; this doth not signifie, that the persons selected for ruin were in a different condition from the rest, or that others had not deserved the like judgments as well as they; it only signifies, that GOD *remembers mercy in the midst of judgment*, and that he was not willing to destroy them all; that *he does not delight in the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness, and live*. He punisheth a few for example, that others taking warning by it, he may have the opportunity and occasion to spare a great many.

Not but that the hand of GOD doth sometimes as it were by a finger point at the sin, which it designs to punish; as when remarkable punishments follow visibly upon notorious sins; when the sinner is punish'd, *flagrante crimine*, in the very act and heat of his sin; when some great and clamorous impiety calls down some more immediate and sudden judgment from heaven; when a sin is punish'd in its own kind, with a judgment so plainly suited to it, and so pat, that the punishment carries the very mark and signature of the sin upon it; as in the case of Adonibezek, who was forc'd to acknowledge, that *as he had done, so GOD had requited him*; and as in the known story of Bajazet, who having been a cruel and barbarous tyrant, was punish'd in his own kind, by falling into the hands of Tamerlain, who used him with the same insolence and cruelty, which he had exercised towards others.

In such cases as these, men may without uncharitableness conclude, that such a judgment of GOD was sent upon a particular errand to chastise and punish such a sin: but then in such cases as these, we do not from the judgments inflicted conclude a person guilty of some great sin which we do not know before; but by comparing the sin, which

which we knew him to be guilty of, with the judgment which was inflicted, we do reasonably collect, that such a judgment was probably sent for such a sin; but generally speaking, no man can with certainty conclude, from the greatness of the judgment that falls upon any one, that such a man was a more grievous sinner than others, who have escaped the same or the like judgments.

II. It is foolish likewise to take any comfort and encouragement to ourselves, that because we have escaped those sore judgments which have befallen others, therefore we are better than they are; for (as I have shewn) these judgments do not necessarily import, that those upon whom they fall, are greater sinners, and that those who escape them, are not so: but suppose it true, that they were greater sinners than we are, for any man from hence to take encouragement to himself to continue in sin, is as if from the severe punishment which is inflicted upon a traitor, a man should encourage himself in felony: both these sorts of criminals are by the law in danger of death, only the circumstances of death are in one case more severe and terrible, than in the other; but he that from hence encourageth himself in felony, reasons very ill, because he argues against his own life. The only prudent inference that can be made, is not to come within the danger of the law, which punisheth all crimes, tho' not with equal severity.

Thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to from these words, *viz.* The wrong use which too many are apt to make of the signal and extraordinary judgments of God upon others. I proceed to the

Second thing I observed in the text, *viz.* The right use we should make of the judgments of God upon others, and that is to reflect upon our own sins, and to repent of them, lest a like or greater judgment overtake us. This our SAVIOUR tells us in the next words, *But except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* As if he had said, there is no reason at all, why ye should conclude from those terrible judgments of God, which have befallen those miserable persons, that they were greater sinners than your selves, who have for the present escaped those judgments

ments: but instead of censuring others, you should look into yourselves; the most proper reflection to be made upon such occasions is, that you are liable to the like judgments, your sins have deserved that God's providence should have dealt so with you, as it hath done with *those Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices; or with those eighteen persons upon whom the tower in Siloam fell;* and for what reasons soever these judgments of God fell upon them, and pass'd by you, (which you are not at all concerned to inquire into) to be sure if you continue impenitent, you have reason to expect the like, or greater punishment.

When we see the judgments of God abroad in the world, and to fall heavily upon particular places and persons, we should argue thus with ourselves: For what reason in the holy and wise providence of God hath dealt so severely with others, I know not; whether out of a particular displeasure against them, for some notorious sin committed by them; or whether for a merciful warning to me and others; or for both; it is not for me to pry curiously into the counsels of God, and to wade into the depth of his judgments: but there is one use which I am sure it concerns me nearly to make of it, to look into myself, *to search and try my ways, to repent of my sins, and to forsake them,* lest whilst I am gazing upon others, I fall into the like or greater calamities. It may be those persons and places, which have been so severely visited with the judgments of God, were no more obnoxious to them, than I am; and when this hath been done to others, I shall appearance not guilty of greater sins than I am, that may not I fear, who am in the same condemnation? It may be they were not so great sinners as I am, this should awaken me so much the more to a consideration of my own danger: nay, possibly many of those whom the rod of God hath smitten, were his own dear children. This should startle men most of all: for *if this have been done to the green tree; what shall be done to the dry?* If this have been the lot of those whom God loves; what shall be the portion of those whom he hates? *If judgment begins at the house of God; where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

The

The judgments of God, which are executed upon particular places and persons, are designed by him to be so many admonitions to *the inhabitants of the world to learn righteousness*. That fearful ruin which befel Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, was not only intended for the punishment of the inhabitants of those wicked cities; but for a standing example and a lasting terrour to all ages of the world. So St. Jude tells us, *ver. vii. that Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

'Tis the advice of the prophet *Micah*, vi. 9. *Hear ye the rod, and him that hath appointed it.* Every rod of God, every affliction hath a voice, which doth not only speak to the sufferers, but to the spectators also; not only to those who are smitten, but to those who stand by and look on: and if, when God sends judgments upon others, we do not take warning and example by them, if instead of reflecting upon ourselves, and trying our own ways, we fall a censuring of others; if we will pervert the meaning of God's providences and will not understand the design and intention of them; then we leave God no other way to awaken us, and to bring us to a consideration of our evil ways, but by pouring down his wrath upon our heads, that so he may convince us to be sinners by the same argument, from whence we have concluded others to be so: or if we continue impenitent, he may ruin us as incorrigible.

And thus I have done with the second observation propounded, *viz.* The right use we ought to make of the judgments of God upon others, which is, to reflect upon ourselves, and to repent of our evil ways, lest the like greater judgments overtake us. I shall only draw an inference or two, from what I have already discoursed upon these two heads.

1. Let us adore the judgments of God, and instead of searching into the particular reasons and ends of them, let us say with St. Paul, *Rom. xi. 33. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* If he was taken up into the third heaven, and had such mul-

tudes of revelations, and was admitted so much nearer to the secrets of God than we are, durst not search into them, how much less should we; we only converse here below.

Let us not then trouble ourselves with nice enquiries into these things; nor one another with mutual censures and uncharitable reflections upon one another: but let us all agree in this, to acknowledge the righteousness of God in all his providences to us and others, *to humble ourselves under his mighty hand, ἀσπάζεσθαι τὰ συμβαίνοντα, to kiss all events of the divine providence,* and to believe, that if we be good, they shall turn to our good. Let us, every one of us, comply with the open and visible ends of God's judgments upon ourselves and others, which is, *to search and try our ways,* and *to return unto the LORD*; and for the rest, let us believe that it is best for us, that things are as they are; that *his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.*

2. Let us not be rash in our censures and determinations concerning the judgments of God upon others; let us not wade beyond our depth into the secrets of God: *for Who hath known the mind of the LORD, or who hath seen his counsellor?* Let us not be hasty and peremptory to pass sentence upon others, because of any evil or calamity that befalls them. We may be as severe to ourselves, as we please, this is safe and prudent; but *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?* What our SAVIOUR said in the case of the woman accused of adultery, is very applicable to those who are so forward to censure others, *is the cause of God's judgments; He that is without sin, let him throw the first stone.* If there be any man that is not conscious to himself that ever he offended and provoked God, that man may have leave to lay all the fault of God's judgments upon others.

God hath of late years in his providence towards this nation so ordered his judgments, and they have fallen with so great an equality upon all sorts of men, that we cannot without great rashness fix the cause of them upon any particulars: but however, this does not appertain to us, to pry into the secret reasons of God's dispensations; that

which properly belongs to us, is to take off our eyes from others, and to look into ourselves; and if we would do this, we should see reason enough for God's judgments, and great cause to admire his mercy and goodness to us, that he hath been pleased to spare us, when he hath ruined so many others.

So that the proper use of all the judgments of God upon others, is to bring us to a consideration of ourselves and our own ways, and to argue ourselves into repentance. We should reason thus, the judgments of God, which have fallen here and there upon others, were intended for terror to us, and if we still continue impenitent, if we be unreformed by these providences of God, which were purposefully designed and intended for our amendment, what can we expect, but that God should also send upon us the like or greater calamities, and that *except we repent, we should all likewise perish.*

I cannot apply these words, as our SAVIOUR does, because as I told you, they are probably a prediction of a particular event to the nation of the Jews, in case they continued impenitent; which they did, and this prophecy was afterward sadly fulfilled upon them in the utter ruin and destruction of that nation: but this we may assuredly say, from the warrant of the general tenour of scripture, that if notwithstanding these great judgments of God which have been upon us, and have made such fearful desolations among us, we do not *search and try our ways, and turn to him who hath smitten others* for a warning to us, we have reason to fear, that we shall suffer in the same manner, or that God will bring some greater temporal judgments upon us, and *be angry with us, until he hath consumed us.*

But whatever God may do, as to temporal judgments this we are as sure of, as the word of God can make us, that there is a sad fate hangs over all impenitent sinners, which however they may escape in this world, will certainly fall upon them in the next. *God hath sworn by his wrath, that such shall not enter into his rest.* He is immutably determined to make such for ever miserable as by their final obstinacy and impenitency refuse to be

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happy. And of this terrible doom, the judgments here in the text are but an imperfect type and representation. How glad would sinners then be, to suffer only such things as the Galileans did! what a favour would they esteem it, to have no worse fate than *those eighteen men, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell!* and to be crush'd under the weight of the heaviest rocks and mountains, and there to lye hid for ever, *from the face of him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!* No, it is a more fearful ruin, a destruction infinitely more terrible, that attends those in another world, who will not repent in this life, even *everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* And how great and fearful that is, is not to be express'd in words, nor can we frame any perfect idea of it from any of those pains and sufferings which we are acquainted with in this world: for *Who knows the power of God's anger?* who can conceive the utmost of what omnipotent justice is able to do to sinners?

Nor have we any reason in the mean time to think, that God will put a stop to temporal judgments; but that if we be not reformed by all those terrible things which our eyes have seen, God will *punish us yet seven times more for our sins.* If we still persist in our atheism and profaneness, in our contempt of God and his worship, in our abominable lusts and impieties; what can we look for, but greater judgments, and a more *fiery indignation* to consume us and our habitations?

It methinks nothing is a sadder presage of greater calamities, and a more fearful ruin yet to befall us, than that we have hitherto been so little reformed by those loud and quick volleys of judgments which have already been thunder'd at upon us. This was that which at last brought so terrible a destruction upon the Egyptians, that they were harden'd under ten plagues. To be impenitent under the judgments of God, which are so mercifully designed to reclaim and reform us, is to poison ourselves with that which was intended for our physick, and by a miraculous kind of obduracy, *to turn the rods of God into serpents.* O that we were wise, that we understood this, and that we would consider our latter end.

TO THE READER.

YOU have here an end of this great work, and I can now assure you, that I have faithfully discharged what at first I promis'd, which was, to give you these sermons truly transcribed from the originals. I have sometimes put two sermons into one, or three into two, (as the author used to do in those he printed) and if on that account I have left out repetitions, or shorten'd some things which had been before printed, yet I never alter'd either the words or sense otherwise than was necessary for the connexion; and as I did this purely to make the work more perfect, I hope, I have rather oblig'd the publick, than deserv'd the censure of any.

By these sermons you have seen how good and useful a preacher the author was; and tho' the publishing of them was all I had to do, yet that the world may see, that he was devout as well as eloquent, I have ventur'd to annex some of his prayers, with a short discourse to his servants before the receiving of the sacrament, all written by his own hand. These are no great addition to the work, and will, I hope, be valued by some, or at the worst can only be blamed as the indiscreet zeal rather than any interest or design of the publisher.

Braisted in Kent,
Dec. 3, 1703.

Ra. Barker

PRAYER

P R A Y E R S

Compos'd by

Arch-Bishop *TILLOTSON*.

To which is added,

A short **D I S C O U R S E** to his Servants
before the **S A C R A M E N T**.

A prayer before the sermon.

Great and glorious **L O R D G O D**! the high and holy one, who inhabitest eternity, and dwellest in that light which is not to be approach'd: We pray thee to look down from heaven, the habitations of thy holiness and thy glory, upon us vile and sinful creatures. Have mercy upon us, **O L O R D**! and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out all our transgressions: And do thou keep it for ever in the purpose and resolution of our heart, to serve and fear thee for the future, and to keep all thy commandments always, that it may be well with us, and with our children after us. We pray thee to this end, to write thy law in our hearts, and to put thy fear into our inward parts, that we may never depart from thee.

Grant us the grace of thy holy Spirit, to become every day better; to reform and amend whatever is amiss in the frame and temper of our minds, or in the course and actions of our lives; to enable us to mortifie our lusts, to govern our passions, and to order our whole conversation aright; to assist us to all that is good, and to keep us from all evil, and to preserve us to thy heavenly kingdom.

We pray thee to instruct us in all the particulars of our duty, which we owe to thee and men; that we may herein

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exercise ourselves always to have consciences void of offence both towards God and towards men; that we may love thee the LORD our God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our strength; and may love our neighbour as ourselves, and whatever we would that men should do unto us, that we may do likewise unto them. And let the grace of God, which hath appeared to all men, and brings salvation, teach us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we may live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; waiting for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

And we pray thee to make us sensible of our own frailty, of the shortness and uncertainty of this life, and of the eternity of the next; to make us careful so to live as we shall wish we had done when we come to die: let our loins always be girded about, and our lamps burning, and we ourselves like unto men that wait for their LORD.

We pray thee with us to extend thy goodness to the whole world. Let thy way be known upon earth, and thy saving health among all nations. Pity and relieve the miseries and afflictions of men; especially those in our neighbour nations, who suffer for thy truth and righteousness sake. Support them, O LORD! under their sufferings; and in thy due time deliver them out of them. We Bless thy Church: Reform whatsoever thou seest to be amiss in the belief and lives of Christians; and grant that all those who profess thy name and the holy religion of our blessed SAVIOUR, may live as it becomes the gospel, and may depart from all iniquity.

In a particular manner we pray thee to be gracious to these sinful nations to which we are related; to pardon our great and crying sins, to prevent those judgments which our sins have justly deserved, and to spare us according to thy great mercy. In a more especial manner, we pray thee to pour down thy blessings upon thy servant and our sovereign, ———, by thy grace king of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, and

all causes and over all persons in these his dominions
supreme governour. Preserve him in his person; make
his government a publick blessing to these nations; let
religion and righteousness flourish under the influences of
it, and let there be abundance of peace in his days. Bless
him in his royal relations, — — — and all the
royal family. And thou who art the wise GOD, and
governest all the affairs of the world, be pleas'd so to
bless and direct all publick counsels and affairs amongst
us, as that they may tend to the advancement of thy
glory, the preservation of religion, and the peace and
happiness of these kingdoms. Bless, we pray thee, all
ranks and orders of men amongst us, and make them all,
in their several places and stations, useful and serviceable
to thy glory and to the publick good. Bless those to
whom thou hast committed the care of instructing and
governing thy Church, by what titles soever they are dis-
tinguish'd, arch-bishops, bishops, and all others that mini-
ster in holy things. We pray thee to make them faithful
to that trust which thou hast committed unto them, and
to grant that by their diligent labours, and prudent carriage,
and holy and exemplary lives, they may gain many unto
righteousness. Bless the two universities of this land;
grant that they may answer the ends of their institution,
that religion and learning and virtue may be the glory of
those places.

We pray thee to bless us thine unworthy servants, who
at this time are assembled and met together in thy name;
to be present in the midst of us, and to assist us in the
work and service which we are about; and to grant that
those truths which shall be delivered to us out of thy word,
may have a due effect and influence upon our hearts
and lives: All which we humbly beg of thee for the sake
of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, in whose holy name and
words, &c.

A prayer,

A prayer, which (as the publisher conjectures) he used before his composing his sermons.

O LORD GOD of truth, I humbly beseech thee to enlighten my mind by thy holy Spirit, that I may discern the true way to eternal salvation: and to free me from all prejudice and passion, from every corrupt affection and interest that may either blind me or seduce me in my search after it.

Make me impartial in my enquiry after truth, and ready whenever it is discovered to me, to receive it in the love of it, to obey it from the heart, and to practise it in my life, and to continue stedfast in the profession of it to the end of my days.

I perfectly resign myself, O LORD, to thy conduct and direction, in confidence that thy mercy and goodness is such, that thou wilt not suffer those who sincerely desire to know the truth, and rely upon thy guidance, finally to miscarry.

And if any thing which concerns the true worship and service of thee my GOD, and the everlasting happiness of my soul, I am in any error and mistake, I earnestly beg of thee to convince me of it, and to lead me into the way of truth; and to confirm and establish me in it daily more and more.

And I beseech thee, O LORD, always to preserve in me a great compassion and sincere charity towards those that are in error, and ignorance of thy truth; beseeching thee to take pity on them, and to bring them to the knowledge of it, that they may be saved.

And because our blessed SAVIOUR hath promised, that all that do his will shall know his doctrine: Grant, O LORD, that I may never knowingly offend thee in any thing, or neglect to do what I know to be thy will and my duty.

Grant, O heavenly Father, these my humble and hearty requests, for his sake who is the way, the truth and the life, my blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus CHRIST, *Amen.*

Prayer

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Prayers used by him the day before his consecration.

MAY 30, 1691. *the day before my consecration to the arch-bishoprick, which was on Whit-sunday, at St. Mary-le-bow, when, on Whit-sunday eve, I retired to Edmonton, to spend that day in fasting and prayer, to implore the blessing of Almighty GOD upon that action, and the assistance of his grace and holy Spirit to be vouchsafed to his sinful and unworthy servant, whom his wise providence, and the importunate desire of their majesties king William and queen Mary, the best of princes, (whom God in great mercy to a most sinful and perverse people bath by a most signal providence set upon the throne of these kingdoms, and sent (I trust) to be our deliverers and benefactors for many generations yet to come) have called to the government and conduct of this miserable distracted church in a very difficult and dangerous time.*

I began with a short prayer to Almighty GOD to prepare my heart for the duty of this day, and to assist me in the discharge of it, in such a manner as might be acceptable in his sight, thro' JESUS CHRIST my blessed Saviour and Redeemer.

I proceeded next to a thanksgiving to Almighty GOD for his mercy and goodness to me in the conduct of my whole life, from my first entrance into the world to this day, which was to this effect.

Almighty and eternal LORD GOD, and most merciful Father, I prostrate myself before thee this day, in a most humble and thankful acknowledgment of thy great mercy and goodness vouchsafed to me a sinful creature, and thy most unprofitable servant (not worthy to be called thy son) in the conduct of my whole life, from my first coming into the world to this present day.

And in the first place I desire to bless thy great and glorious name, that I was born of honest and religious parents, tho' of a low and obscure condition. 1 Chron. xii. 16, 17. *Who am I, O LORD GOD, or what is my cause, that thou hast brought me hitherto? and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD GOD!*

I bless

I bleſs thee likewise for all the happy circumstances of my birth and education ; that I was born in a time and place wherein thy true religion was preached and professed. I bleſs thee for the great care of my good parents to bring me up in the knowledge and fear of *thee, the only true GOD*, and of *him whom thou haſt ſent, JESUS CHRIST, whom to know is eternal life* ; and I bleſs thee, my LORD, for him *in whom all the nations of the earth are bleſſed, whom in the fulneſs of time, thou waſt pleaſed to ſend into the world to be the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind.*

I bleſs thee that thou waſt pleaſed to give my ever honoured and good father the heart to give me, out of the ſmall eſtate thou gaveſt him, ſo liberal an education, whereby I was put into a capacity to ſerve thee. Forgive, I beſeech thee, O LORD, that I have made no better uſe of the talents and opportunities wherewith thou haſt entrusted me, and accept of that little which by thy grace I have been enabled ſincerely to do for thee. I bleſs thee, O LORD, for the continual and bountiful ſupport of thy providence, whereby thou haſt alſo enabled me to return to my parents and their children the kindneſs I received from them, and to be ſtill as a father to them. I bleſs thee that thou haſt ſo mercifully and ſo many times preſerved me from the great dangers to which my life was expoſed ; and from temptations which would have been too hard for me, if thy grace had not prevented them, and kept me from falling into them : This, O LORD, I acknowledge as one of the great bleſſings of my life, for which I deſire continually to magnifie thy great and glorious name.

I bleſs thee likewise, O LORD ! for that meaſure of health which I have enjoyed, and for my recovery from a great and dangerous ſickneſs ; for any happy endowments of mind ; for that degree of underſtanding which thou haſt given me ; and for preſerving it to me, when my dear mother, for ſo many years of her life, loſt the uſe and enjoyment of it, and might have derived that unhappineſs to me her child, if thy merciful goodneſs had not prevented it. Forgive me, O LORD ! that I have made no better uſe of the faculties, which thou haſt endowed

me withal, for thy glory, and the benefit and advantage of others.

Blessed be thy name likewise, that thou hast at any time of life, and in any measure render'd me useful to any good purpose. I acknowledge it to be all from thee; and I desire to return the praise of all to thee my great and constant benefactor.

Blessed be GOD, for the favour thou hast given me with men both of low and high condition; and the friends which thou hast raised up for me, to preserve me from the malice of mine enemies, and those who *bate me without a cause*, and *not for any fault of mine* towards them, O LORD, *thou knowest*.

More especially I bless thee for that great and undeserved favour which I have found in the eyes of our excellent king and queen. Give me, O LORD, the heart, and, if it be thy will, the opportunity to serve them in some measure to answer their favours to me, and the good opinion they have conceived of me, by rendering me useful and instrumental for the publick good of this distracted kingdom and church, in endeavouring to heal and reconcile our unhappy differences, and to reform the disorders that are in my Church, and the lives and manners both of the ministers and people.

Finally, I bless thee for all the favours and blessings of my life both spiritual and temporal, so plentifully bestowed upon me; and above all, for a sincere desire to serve and please thee, my most gracious and merciful GOD, and to do good to men made after thine image.

Accept, O LORD! this my hearty sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which I offer up to thy divine majesty, thro' the merits and mediation of JESUS CHRIST, my blessedaviour and Redeemer. *Amen, Amen.*

Next I made this humble and penitent confession of my sins, and earnest supplication for the pardon and forgiveness of them.

I bow myself before thee, most holy and gracious LORD GOD, in a deep sense of mine own vileness and sinfulness, which render me altogether unworthy of the least of those many favours and blessings wherewith thou hast been pleas'd

pleas'd to follow me all the days of my life. I am a sinful man, O LORD, and not worthy to lift up mine eyes to thee my God. My whole life hath been little else but a continued course of disobedience, of unthankfulness, and unworthy returns to thee for all thy benefits. I have gone *astray from the womb*, and have grievously transgressed thy holy laws and commandments, in thought, word, and deed.

I desire now to confess my sins to thee, and with great shame and contrition to bewail and lament them in thy presence. *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son*, so that if thou be strict to mark iniquity, O LORD! who can stand? LORD, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

I confess the folly of my childhood, and the great sins and vanities of my youth, and the many great provocations which in the course of my life I have been often, too often guilty of; the impurities of my heart, and the many evil actions of my life, which thou, O LORD! knowest all together; and for which I desire to take shame to myself, and to be confounded before thee at the remembrance of them. LORD, they are all in thy sight, and the most secret sins of my life in the light of thy countenance. I am ashamed, O God, and blush to lift up mine eyes to thee my God.

I confess likewise before thee, that I have grievously omitted and neglected my duty to thee, in not making better use of the talents and opportunities of doing good which thou hast entrusted me withal. I have offended grievously, and been wanting to my duty, in a great part of my life; toward those whom thou hast committed to my charge, in not instructing them, and watching over them as I ought, to inform them in the good knowledge of God; and to improve in other knowledge as was my duty to have done. LORD, forgive this great and heinous sin.

I have offended against thee by anger and impatience upon many occasions; by neglecting to cultivate my mind and to govern my passions; by uncharitableness and evil speaking; and especially by mispending my precious time

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which might have been employed to excellent purposes. LORD, what can I say unto thee for these and innumerable other provocations of my life? But *there is forgiveness with thee, that thou may'st be feared.* LORD, let thy goodness, which I have had such plentiful experience of, lead me to repentance, and not to be repented of.

Have mercy upon me, O LORD, and according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out all my transgressions, for thy mercy in JESUS CHRIST, whom thou hast set forth as propitious by his blood for the sins of the whole world.

I do now, O LORD, in a deep sense of my sinfulness, and a hearty contrition for all my faults of omission and commission which I have been guilty of, humble myself before thee, and earnestly implore thy mercy and forgiveness. I do not only repent of all the evils of my past life; but am now fully resolved by thy grace utterly to forsake them, and break off the practice of them; and do most heartily beg the assistance of thy grace to make good this holy resolution for the remaining part of my life. Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me; and do thou keep it forever in the purpose and resolution of my heart, to make good what I have now so solemnly promised to thee; suffer me not to turn again to sin and folly: but let thy grace continually preserve me, and enable me to do better; and let not sin have any more dominion over me, that I should give it in the lusts of it.

Grant this, O merciful Father, for the sake of my blessed Saviour and Redeemer, who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and now sitteth at thy right hand to make intercession for sinners: In his name and mediation I offer up this act of repentance, and these my humble supplications for pardon and forgiveness, for thy grace and assistance, concluding all in his comprehensive prayer. *Our Father, &c.*

Next a prayer for God's blessing upon me, and his; and the Holy Spirit to be conferred upon me in the solemn dedication of me the day following to this high and holy office.

Almighty and most merciful LORD GOD, the giver of every good and perfect gift, and the Father of lights, who

hast promised, that *if any man lack wisdom*, he shall ask it of thee, who givest to all liberally and upbraidest not, and it shall be given him; I most humbly beseech thee in the solemn action of the day following, wherein I thy servant am to be dedicated, and set apart to the service of thee, and thy church, in so high and holy an office, to shed forth upon me, thy most unworthy servant, the gifts and graces of thy Holy Spirit in a plentiful measure.

And since by thine own wise and good providence, and the importunate desire of those whom thou hast set in authority over us, I am called to the government and conduct of this miserable distracted and divided church, in so very difficult and dangerous a time, be pleased of thine infinite mercy and goodness to thy sinful and most unworthy servant, to afford him the grace and assistance of thy Holy Spirit, to enable him so to discharge the office which thou hast called him to, that thy name may be glorified, and this church, which thou hast committed to his charge, may be edified in faith and holiness, in love, peace, and union, by his diligent and faithful care and endeavours; grant to him such a degree of health, such a vigour of mind, and such a measure of thy heavenly grace and wisdom, as may fit him to be a useful pastor of thy church. Give me, O LORD, a mind, *after thine own heart*, that I may delight to do thy will, O my God, and let thy law be written in my heart. Give me courage and resolution to do my duty, and a heart to spend myself and to be spent in thy service, and in doing all the good that possibly I can the few remaining days of my pilgrimage here on earth.

I have had great experience of thy great mercy and goodness to me all my days: Psal. xxvii. 9, 11. *Hide not thy face from me in this needful time. Thou hast been my help; leave me not, nor forsake me, O God of my Salvation; teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path because of mine enemies.* Psal. xxxviii. 15, 16. *In thee, O LORD, do I hope; thou wilt bear, O LORD my God; bear me lest otherwise mine enemies should rejoyce over me, and when my foot slippeth they should magnifie themselves against me. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand*

the wicked, out of the hands of unrighteous and cruel men : for thou art my hope, O LORD GOD, thou hast been my trust from my youth, by thee have I been holden up from the womb ; my praise shall be continually of thee. I am as a wonder unto many ; but thou art my strong refuge. Cast me not off in the time of old age, forsake me not when my strength faileth. O GOD, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works : now also when I am old and grey-headed, forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to them that are to come. Hear me, O LORD, for thy mercy's sake in JESUS CHRIST my blessed Saviour and Redeemer. *Amen.*

Then I read the prayers in the consecration office. I concluded with a prayer for the king and queen, and a short exhortation.

O LORD and heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings, and Lord of lords, the only ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth, most heartily I beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious sovereign Lord and lady, king William and queen Mary ; endue them with all those graces and virtues which may fit them for that high station wherein thou hast placed them ; give them wisdom and understanding to go in and out before this great people, and a heart to seek their good all the days of their lives ; and make them great examples of piety and virtue in an evil and degenerate age. Preserve them in their persons, govern their counsels, and prosper their forces by sea and land, and make them victorious over their enemies. Be pleased to take the person of the king into the particular care of thy providence. Give thy angels charge over him to keep him in all his ways ; cover him with thy shield in the day of battle ; and crown him with victory and good success. Give courage and resolution to him, and to his armies and fleets, and take away the hearts of his enemies. Scatter the people that delight in war ; show thyself, thou judge of the earth, and render a reward to the proud. Let not iniquity always triumph in the

oppression of thy people. *Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end ; but do thou establish the just.*

I beseech thee to bless and strengthen the queen, to whom thou hast now committed the care and government of these nations. Give her wisdom and resolution for such a time as this. Discover and defeat all the designs of wicked and unreasonable men against the persons of their majesties, and against our peace and religion, and *turn their counsels into foolishness.* Strike through the loins of those that rise up against that happy government, which thy signal providence hath establish'd among us. O LORD bless them both (if it be thy blessed will) with a hopeful issue to sit upon the throne after them, and to be a blessing to these nations for many generations. This O LORD, is not impossible with thee. Have a gracious regard, I beseech thee, to the humble condition of the queen thy servant, and make *her that was barren to sing, and to become a joyful mother of children.* Hear my prayer, O LORD, in this behalf, for thy mercy's sake in JESUS CHRIST. *Amen.*

And now, O LORD, I humbly beseech thee to accept of these my praises and thanksgivings, which I have humbly offer'd to thy divine Majesty ! of my humiliation and repentance for all the sins of my life : and of my resolution of a better obedience for the future, and to enable me by thy grace to make them good. Hear likewise my prayers and supplications for thy blessing upon the solemn action of the day following, and upon thine unworthy servant who is to be dedicated to thy service, and for them whom thou hast set over us ; and for the sinful nations ; and all for the sake of *thy dearly beloved Son, in whom thou art well pleased, JESUS CHRIST righteous ;*

In whose name and words I concluded my prayers.

Our Father, &c.

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A Discourse to his Servants, concerning receiving the Sacrament.

—**N**OW that I have mention'd the Sacrament, I have a great desire, that as many of you as can should receive it at *Easter*, and that you should carefully prepare yourselves for it against that time. It is the most solemn institution of our religion, and as we are Christians, we are obliged to the frequent receiving of it, and we cannot neglect it without a great contempt of our blessed Saviour and his religion. He hath appointed it for a solemn remembrance of his great love to us, in laying down his life for us, and therefore he commands us *to do it in remembrance of him*; and St. Paul tells us, that *as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we do shew forth the LORD's death till he come*.

Both the comfort and the benefit of it are great. The comfort of it; because it does not only represent to us the exceeding love of our SAVIOUR, in giving his body to be broken, and his blood to be shed for us; but it likewise seals to us all those blessings and benefits which are purchased and procured for us by his death and passion; the pardon of sins; and power against sin.

The benefit of it is also great; because hereby we are confirm'd in goodness, and our resolutions of better obedience are strengthened; and the grace of God's holy spirit to enable us to do his will is hereby conveyed to us.

And the best preparation for it is by a sincere repentance for all our sins and miscarriages, which we remember our selves to be at any time guilty of: By daily prayer to God that he would give us a sincere repentance for all our sins, and mercifully forgive them to us: And a sincere and firm resolution to forsake our sins, and do better for the future; to be more careful of all our actions, and more constant in prayer to God for his grace to enable us to keep his commandments: By being in charity with all men; and by forgiving those who have injured us by word or deed, as we hope for forgiveness from God.

And let none of us say, that we are not fitted and prepared for it. It is our duty to be so: And if we be not prepared to receive the Sacrament, we are not qualified for the mercy of God, and for his forgiveness; we are not prepared for the happiness of heaven, and can have no hopes to come thither: But if we prepare ourselves as well as we can by repentance, and resolutions of being better, and by praying heartily and earnestly to God, for his grace, he will accept of this preparation, and will give us the comfort of this holy Sacrament.

A form of Prayers, used by his late Majesty K. William III. when he received the Holy Sacrament, and on other occasions.

JOHN IX. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

COLOS. III. 17.

Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the LORD JESUS, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

A Prayer to God, that he would be pleased to assist and accept my Preparation to receive the B. Sacrament.

I Prostrate myself before thee, my most gracious God and merciful Father, in an humble acknowledgment of my unworthiness and insufficiency of my self, for any thing that is good. I am sensible that without thee I can do nothing; and therefore do humbly implore thy gracious assistance, and acceptance of my endeavour to prepare myself

myself for the worthy receiving of the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of thy dear Son.

Stir up, I beseech thee, such pious affections and dispositions in my soul, and fill my mind with such holy meditations as are suitable to this occasion. Grant me such a sense of my sins, and of the sufferings of my blessed SAVIOUR for them, as may affect my heart with a deep sorrow for my sins, and an eternal hatred and displeasure against them, and may effectually engage me to love and live to him who dy'd for me, JESUS CHRIST my blessed SAVIOUR and Redeemer. *Amen.*

A penitent confession of Sins, with an humble Supplication for mercy and forgiveness.

MOST gracious and merciful GOD, who art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity: I desire to humble my soul before thee, in a deep sense of my own wileness and unworthiness, by reason of the many sins and provocations, which I have been guilty of against thy divine Majesty; by thought, word and deed. Forgive, O LORD, all the sins and follies of my life, which have been many and great; and which I do now with shame and sorrow confess and bewail before thee, for thy mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST. Pardon, O my God, my manifold neglects and omissions, and slight and careless performance of the duties of religion, without due affection and attention of mind: that I have not served thee with that purity of intention, with that sincerity of heart, with that fervency of spirit, with that zeal for thy glory, with that care and diligence, and constancy, that I ought.

Forgive, O LORD, my sins of ignorance and infirmity, which are more than can be numbred; but especially, all my wilful transgressions of thy holy and righteous laws; the impurity of my heart and thoughts, all irregular appetites and passions, and every sinful and wicked practice, of what nature or kind soever. More particularly, I do with great shame and confusion of face, confess and lament

lament before thee, from whom nothing is hid, that I have grievously offended. * These my transgressions, with many more, which I cannot remember and reckon up before thee, are all in thy sight, O LORD, and my most secret sins in the light of thy countenance. When I look back upon the errors and miscarriages of my past life, and consider with myself what I have done, and what I deserve at thy hands, my flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments. I am ashamed, O my GOD, and blush to lift up mine eyes to thee my GOD. LORD, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Make me deeply sensible of the great evil of my sins, and work in me a hearty contrition for them; and let the sense of them be more grievous to me than of any other evil whatsoever. Have mercy upon me, O LORD, and according to thy tender mercies forgive all my transgressions, for the sake of my blessed Saviour and Redeemer, Amen.

A Prayer for the Grace and assistance of GOD's Holy Spirit, to enable me to resolve and to do better for the future.

AND now, O LORD, in confidence of thy great mercy and goodness to all that are truly penitent, and sincerely resolve to do better, I most humbly implore the grace and assistance of thy holy Spirit, to enable me to become every day better, and to reform whatever has been amiss in the temper and disposition of my mind, or in any of the actions of my life. Grant me the wisdom and understanding to know my duty, and the heart and will to do it. Vouchsafe to me the continual presence and direction, the assistance and comforts of thy holy Spirit; whereby I may be dispos'd and enabled to do thy will with delight and cheerfulness, and with patience and contentedness to submit to it in all things. Endue me, O LORD, with the true fear and love of thee, and

* Here he was us'd to mention particulars.

with

with a prudent zeal for thy glory. Encrease in me more and more the graces of charity and meekness of truth, and justice, and fidelity; give me humility and patience, and a firmness of spirit to bear every condition with constancy and equality of mind.

Enable me, O LORD, by thy grace to govern all my appetites, and every inordinate lust and passion, by temperance and purity, and meekness of wisdom; setting thee always before me, that I may not sin against thee. Create in me a clean heart, O GOD, and renew a right spirit within me: purifie my soul from all evil thoughts and inclinations, from all bad intentions and designs. Deliver me, O LORD, from pride and vanity, from immoderate self-love, and obstinate self-will, and from all malice and envy, and ill will towards any.

Make me to love thee, as I ought, above all things; and let the interest of thy honour and glory be ever dearer to me than my own will, or reputation, or any temporal advantage whatsoever.

Subdue in me the evil spirit of wrath and revenge, and dispose my heart patiently to bear reproaches and wrongs, and to be ready not only to forgive, but to return good for evil.

Assist me, O LORD, more especially in the faithful and conscientious discharge of the duties of that high station in which thou hast placed me: And grant that I may employ all that power and authority which thou hast invested me with, for thy glory and the publick good; that I may rule over men in thy fear, with justice and equity, ever studying and endeavouring the good of the people committed to my charge, and as much as in me lies the peace and prosperity, the welfare and happiness of mankind.

Confirm me, O my GOD, in all these holy resolutions; and do thou keep it for ever in the purpose of my heart, to perform them to the utmost of my power: All which I humbly beg for thy mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST.

Amen.

An

An humble intercession with GOD for all mankind; for the whole Christian Church, and more particularly for that part of it which is planted in these kingdoms; for the Queen, and for all under our government; for my relations and friends; for my native country, and for my allies, &c.

I Thine unworthy servant desire likewise humbly to intercede with thee, the GOD and Father of all, for all mankind; that thou wouldest be pleased to have compassion upon their blindness and ignorance, their gross errors and their wicked practices. Send forth, I beseech thee, thy light and thy truth, to scatter that thick darkness which covers the nations, and overspreads so great a part of the world; that thy way may be known upon earth, and thy saving health among all nations.

Bless and preserve thy church dispersed over the face of the earth, restore to it unity and concord, in the acknowledgment of the truth, and the practice of righteousness and goodness. Remove out of it all errors and corruptions, all offences and scandals, all divisions and dissensions, all tyranny and usurpation over the minds and consciences of men; that they who profess the same faith, may no longer persecute and destroy one another, but may be kind and tender-hearted one towards another, as it becomes brethren, and those that are heirs of the same common salvation.

I beseech thee more especially, to be merciful to that part of thy church, which thou hast planted in these kingdoms. Pity the distractions and heal the breaches of it. Purge out of it all impiety and profaneness; take away those mistakes, and mutual exasperations, which cause so much distemper and disturbance; and restore to it piety and virtue, peace and charity. Endue the pastors and governours of it with the spirit of true religion and goodness, and make them zealous and diligent to promote it in those who are under their instruction and care. Give them wisdom to discern the best and most proper means

of composing the differences of this miserably divided church, the heart to endeavour it, and by thy blessing upon their endeavours the happiness to effect it.

And I beseech thee, O LORD, of thy great goodness, to bless all my relations and friends; particularly my nearest consort the queen. I acknowledge thy special providence in bringing us together, and thereby giving me the opportunity and means of being instrumental in securing these nations from misery and ruin. And as thou hast been pleased to unite us in the nearest relation; I beseech thee to preserve and continue that entire love and affection between us, which becomes that relation. And if it be thy blessed will, and thou seest it best for us, bless us with children, to sit upon the throne of these kingdoms, and to be a blessing to them for many generations.

Be merciful also, O God, to my native country; let the religion and righteousness be established among them, the surest foundation of their peace and prosperity.

Bless all my allies; O righteous LORD, that lovest righteousness, and hatest falsehood and wrong, do thou stand by us in the maintenance of that just cause in which we are engaged, and bless us with union and good success. And in thy good time, O LORD, restore peace to Christendom; put an end to those bloody wars and desolations, wherewith it hath been so long and so miserably afflicted: And, when thou seest it best and fittest, manifest thy glorious justice in giving check to that ambition and cruelty, which hath been the cause of so great animities, to so great a part of the world. O God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance longeth, shew thyself: Lift up thyself thou judge of the earth, and render a reward to the proud: Scatter the people that delight in war: Let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but do thou establish the just.

Be merciful, O God, to all that are in affliction or distress; that labour under poverty, or persecution, or sickness; under bodily pains and diseases, or under temptation and trouble of mind: Be pleased to support and comfort them, and in thy due time to deliver them according to thy great mercy.

Forgive,

Forgive, I beseech thee, most merciful Father, to all mine enemies all their malice and ill will towards me and give them repentance and better minds: which heartily beg of thee for them, as I myself hope for mercy and forgiveness at thy hands, through the merits and mediation of JESUS CHRIST, my most merciful God and Saviour. *Amen.*

A Thankful acknowledgment of the mercies of God both temporal and spiritual; and above all for the redemption of mankind by the humiliation and sufferings of his Son in our nature.

Blessed and glorious LORD GOD, the great creator and preserver, and governour of all things; my Saviour and deliverer, and continual benefactor; I acknowledge and admire, I adore thy infinite excellencies and perfections. And let all the creatures in heaven and earth say, *Amen.*

I Render thanks to thee, most gracious God, for innumerable favours conferred upon me thy poor creature, and most unworthy; for my being, for my reason and for all other endowments and faculties of soul and body; for thy continual care and watchful providence over me from the beginning of my life, and through the whole course of it: For all the happy circumstances of my birth and education: For the pious care of my dear and honoured mother, and grandmother, and of all others who had the charge of me in my tender years: For thy unwearied patience towards me, after so many and so great provocations: And for thy merciful and wonderful preservation of me from innumerable dangers and deaths, which I have been exposed all my life. I will still be in thy goodness, O LORD, who hast been my trust from my youth; by thee have I been holden up from my womb, my praise shall be continually of thee. *Amen.* All I adore thy tender mercy and compassion to me

all mankind, in sending thy only Son into the world to redeem us from sin and misery, and by suffering in our nature and dying in our stead, to purchase for us eternal life. I bless thee for the light of the glorious gospel, for the knowledge and sense of my duty towards thee; for delivering me from temptations too hard for me, and supporting me under many: For the directions and assistance, and comforts of thy Holy Spirit: For restraining me by thy grace, and reclaiming me from the ways of sin and vanity: And for all the gracious communications of thy goodness, whereby thou hast inclined my heart to love and fear thee, and enabled me in any measure to do thy will.

For these and all other thy blessings and favours to me, which are more than can be number'd; I render unto thee, most gracious God, all possible praise and thanks to JESUS CHRIST my blessed LORD and Saviour. *Amen.*

Prayer to GOD, to prepare my heart for the worthy receiving of the holy sacrament, and to make me partaker of the blessings and benefits of it.

Come to thee, O my LORD GOD, from whom are the preparation of the heart, and the good disposition of our minds for thy worship and service. Fit me, O LORD, by hearty contrition for my sins, and a sincere resolution of a better course, to approach thy altar. Account of the expiation which thy Son hath made of all transgressions by the sacrifice of himself, as of a lamb without spot and blemish. Let the remembrance of my sins, and of his bitter sufferings for them, pierce my very heart, and engage me for ever to love and serve him, who hath given down his life for me. Cleanse me, O LORD, from uncleanness of flesh and spirit, that I may be a meet partaker of thy holy table, and a real partaker of those blessings and benefits which are represented in the sacrament of CHRIST's body and blood. Strengthen, O LORD, all good resolutions in me; enable me by thy grace

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faithfully to perform the conditions of that covenant, which I made in baptism, and intend to renew in the holy sacrament, by dedicating myself entirely, and for ever, to the service of my blessed Redeemer, who hath loved me, and washed me from my sins in his own blood. To him be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, love and obedience for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Short meditations and ejaculations at the Communion.

Before the Minister begins the Service.

I Lift up my soul to thee, my GOD, humbly imploring thy blessing upon me, and gracious assistance of me in the holy action I am now about. Forgive my want of due preparation, and accept of my sincere desire to perform an acceptable service to thee, through JESUS CHRIST.

Before the receiving of the Bread,

LORD, I am not worthy of the crumbs, which fall from thy table.

After the receiving of it.

Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend.

Herein hath GOD commended his love to us, that whilst we were enemies, he gave his Son to die for us.

Before the receiving of the Cup.

What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits? I will take the cup of salvation, and I will bless the name of the LORD.

After the receiving of it.

Blessed be GOD for his unspeakable gift, his dearly beloved Son JESUS CHRIST, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

After the conclusion of the whole Action.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me
bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and
forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine ini-
quities, and healeth all thy diseases: Who redeemeth
thy life from destruction; and crowneth thee with loving
kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth
with good things. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

A Prayer to be used in private afterwards.

I praise and magnifie thy great and glorious name, O
LORD my GOD, for the blessed opportunity afforded to
me this day, of commemorating thy infinite goodness and
mercy to me and all mankind, in sending thy only Son
into the world to take our nature upon him, to submit
to the infirmities and miseries of it, to live amongst us,
and to dye for us: And to preserve the memory of this
great love and goodness of thine to us for ever in our
hearts, that thou hast been pleased to appoint the blessed
sacrament, for a solemn remembrance of it. Grant, O
LORD, that I may faithfully keep and perform that holy
covenant which I have this day so solemnly renewed and
confirmed in thy presence, and at thy table. Let it be
an eternal obligation upon me of perpetual love and
obedience to thee. Let nothing seem hard for me to do,
grievous for me to suffer for thy sake, who whilst I
was a sinner, and an enemy to thee, lovedst me at such
rate as never any man did his friend.

Grant that by this sacrament there may be conveyed
to my soul new spiritual life and strength, and such a
measure of thy grace and assistance as may enable me to
the greater care of my duty for the future: That I may

henceforth live as becomes the redeemed of the Lord; even to him who died for my sins, and rose again for my justification, and is now set down on the right hand of the throne of God, to make intercession for me: In his holy name and words, I conclude my imperfect prayers.

OUR Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

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